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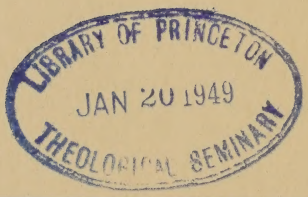

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Thinking Christianly

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Thinking Christianly

W. BURNET EASTON, JR.
Lawrence College, Appleton, Wisconsin

New York
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1948

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To
the Memory of
my

FATHER AND MOTHER
Layman and Laywoman

Who fought the good fight, who finished the race,
who kept the faith

Preface

A WORD OF EXPLANATION ABOUT THIS BOOK, IN ORDER that the reader may be forewarned, is in order.

One of the few fortunate results of the catastrophe we have been going through but which is by no means yet over is that it has compelled many of us who claim to be Christian to dig deeper and to rethink the meaning of our faith. This book is intended as one person's contribution to that process. This means that this book is not primarily a defense of the Christian faith. None of the major Christian beliefs such as the beliefs in God, Jesus Christ, the Church, Immortality, etc., as such, are defended or argued. These basic beliefs are taken for granted, and what is written here assumes them and assumes that the reader has gotten beyond the point where he has to have, say, the belief in God demonstrated for him again. My concern is rather to rethink what, once the Christian faith is accepted, that faith means for various aspects of the Christian's life in our particular kind of a world. I believe there are multitudes of people, both in and out of our churches, who do not need to be told again that they must have faith (they already know that) ; what they want to know is how to apply the faith so that it makes a difference in their daily lives. It is in this area I have tried to write. Thus, for instance, the chapter "Thinking Christianly About Death" is not an argument for belief in life

after death; rather it is an attempt to discover what the significance of a Christian understanding of death means for life. In a word, this is a book by a Christian for Christians asking them to think about what it means to be a Christian.

Because this book concerns itself with the applications of Christian faith to the complexities of modern life rather than stating the fundamentals of the faith, I am fully aware that it enters an area where there are legitimate differences of opinion. The basic Christian beliefs are established, and about them one can write with considerable dogmatism, but honest and equally sincere Christians can have different opinions about how the faith should be worked out in the various circumstances of life. When it comes to these questions I have no more authority than anybody else. I am fully convinced that the general point of view which I have tried to express is the one in which Christian thinking must go, and I have written as vigorously as I know how in presenting my opinion on the questions considered in the various chapters. I hope I shall persuade others to agree with me. (There would be no point in writing at all if one did not believe what one wrote enough to want to persuade others of its validity.) Agreement with me, however, is not my major intention. My major intention is to arouse Christians to think about the meaning of their faith. If I succeed in this I shall be satisfied even though the reader disagrees with some of my conclusions.

The original impetus for the book came as an invitation to give a series of lectures before the Ministers' Graduate School of the Troy (N.Y.) Methodist Conference in June 1946. The material given at that time has been extensively

revised and more added. Nevertheless, those lectures provide the nucleus of the book, and I would like to take this occasion to thank the Troy Conference both for the invitation to speak and for a very friendly reception.

I would also like to thank the magazines, *The Intercollegian, Christianity and Society* and *Theology Today* for permission to reprint material which originally appeared in their pages. The New Testament quotations used are taken from the *New Revised Standard New Testament,* copyrighted by the International Council of Religious Education. Reference to other quotations are noted in the footnotes. I am indebted to the publishers for permission to use these quotations.

Acknowledgment should also be made of indebtedness to various friends who either read or patiently listened to parts of this book. I am particularly indebted to the Rev. Thomas Shoesmith, Christ's Episcopal Church, Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, and to my colleagues on the Faculty of Lawrence College, Dr. Roy Eckardt and Dr. Craig Thompson, for reading the entire manuscript and offering valuable criticisms and suggestions. The responsibility, however, for what is said is entirely mine. I wish to thank Mrs. Jean P. Parmelee and especially Mrs. Beatrice T. Bennett for their help in typing the manuscript. To my wife I owe a debt which only I can appreciate.

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Lawrence College
Appleton, Wisconsin

April 12, 1948

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Thinking Christianly

1

Introduction

I DO NOT RECALL JUST WHERE I FIRST PICKED UP THE expression, "Thinking Christianly." Unfortunately I am not the kind of person who keeps careful notes. Wherever I picked it up, however, the pregnancy of the phrase has been gradually but steadily forcing itself upon me. It expresses better than any phrase I know the kind of thinking that is required of those of us who call ourselves Christians.

At first glance, this statement may seem somewhat platitudinous. Of course Christians ought to think Christianly. On further thought, however, it is not quite that simple. If to "think Christianly" means anything, it means to think differently from the usual forms of thinking. It means to consider all the problems of life in a perspective quite different from the conventional perspectives. To do this is hard—far harder than most of us realize, for most of us are so completely and usually unconsciously absorbed in the conventional values and patterns of our twentieth-century western civilization that even when we try to think Christianly we are actually thinking conventionally.

Such a statement needs elaboration and in this Introduction I want to distinguish between what I call "Thinking

Christianly" and other kinds of thinking, and to indicate some of the difficulties involved in "Thinking Christianly." In the rest of the book, I shall probe deeper into the meaning of so thinking and consider some of the problems it raises for the Christian. Before going on, however, one word of warning or confession is needed. I am fully aware that I am as much a product of twentieth-century middle-class America as anybody else. I do not know or claim to know all that it means to think Christianly. I am as liable as the next person to confuse what is truly Christian with what is secular. Yet I am convinced that this is the direction in which we who are Christians must strive to go: throwing off as far as possible the conventions and the secular thought patterns, we must seek an independent basis for our faith and then try to apply it. I do not claim to have succeeded in achieving this independent Christian thinking very completely. This book will have served its function if it makes its point of view compelling enough to lead others, more emancipated than I, to think further than I have so far been able to go.

What Thinking Christianly Is Not

Perhaps the best way to begin is by stating three convictions. One of these convictions is that not only has Christianity something important to say to our world; it has the *only* important thing to say. The second is that by and large organized Christianity is not saying its message very well or very compellingly. And the third is that the reason for this failure is that Christians themselves do not really think Christianly, nor speak Christianly. Rather, what we Chris-

tians do, is to think conventionally and then add a few pious phrases and Biblical quotations to make the thinking appear Christian. Christianity has something unique to say to our world, but if it is to say it, Christians must recognize that it must be said from a totally different type of approach. To think Christianly is not to repeat the best thoughts of our best secular thinkers after them, only reclothed in Christian terminology. This is just what we have been doing. Too many sermons and Christian pronouncements simply take the ideas of our better, or at least our more popular secular, political analysts, or psychologists, or sociologists, or educators, and repeat them with a few references to God or a few apt Biblical quotations interspersed. This is not thinking Christianly.

Take for example the matter of the atomic bomb. The bomb seems to have everyone scared. So scared are the scientists who know most about it that they go about lecturing and writing books like "I Am a Frightened Man," and, amazingly enough, are turning to the Church for help! And what is the Church saying? With some notable exceptions the Church by and large is saying something like this, "This is awful! We are now in a race between Christian morality and self-destruction. Only Christian morality will save the world." For all I know, this may be true. But it is not helpful; neither is it particularly Christian. It is really only repeating what the frightened scientists said to the Church when they asked for help in the first place. Moreover, at its best this is pretty hopeless advice for at least two reasons. In the first place, the chance of the Church's converting the non-Christian world completely enough or fast enough to save us from atomic self-destruction, if this is the only solution there is,

is so remote as to be ridiculous. There may be some, but I do not know of anyone who has joined the Church because of the atomic bomb. If converting all the non-Christians in the world to Christianity is our only hope, we are all doomed right now! A second and more profound reason is that even the minority of those who try to be Christians are not Christian enough. Even if everybody became Christian, there is no reason to be sure that, under sufficient stress to preserve what they believed had to be preserved, Christians might not use the atomic bomb. Unpleasant though it may be to contemplate, sincere Christians have fought sincere Christians before, and they have used frightful means to gain their ends. There is no justifiable reason to assume that this can never happen again.

The stupidity of most Christian pronouncements about the atomic bomb illustrates in one pertinent area what I mean by *not* thinking Christianly. In general, the Church and Christian spokesmen are not saying anything unique or particularly Christian. They are not saying anything that a confused but high-minded secularist might not say except that the Christians use Christian phraseology. On this basis it is no wonder that thoughtful people are not turning to the Church even though the diabolical turn of recent historical events has given their previous complacent optimism a pretty severe shaking. They will not turn to it until the Church has something to say that is unique, something that is more than the best thoughts of men, something that is the voice of God.

In the January 1940 issue of *Fortune Magazine* there was an editorial which stated this whole problem succinctly. It is significant that the editorial was written by laymen. It

created some furor at the time but not enough. It is as pertinent today as it was in 1940. In part it says:

> We are asked to turn to the Church for our enlightenment, but when we do so we find that the voice of the Church is not inspired. The voice of the Church today, we find, is the echo of our own voices. The result of this experience already manifest is disillusionment . . . this is not disillusionment in the ability of man to win wars or make peace after wars. It is the profound absolute disillusionment, arising from the fact that when we consult the Church we hear only what we ourselves have said. The effect of this experience upon the present generation has been profound. It is the effect of a vicious spiral, like the spirals that economists talk about that lead us to depressions. But in this spiral there is a stake, not merely prosperity but civilization.
>
> There is only one way out of this spiral. The way out is the sound of a voice, not our voice, but a voice coming from something not ourselves, in the existence of which we dare not disbelieve.[1]

The only criticism I should make of this statement is of the implication that the success of Christianity depends upon saving civilization. As I shall point out later [2] the validity of Christianity does not depend upon *its ability to save any given economic system or any given civilization.* To think that it does is one of the most pertinent illustrations of our inability to think Christianly. It falsely identifies our cultural patterns with Christianity and insists that the two are identical and that the success or failure of Christianity depends upon its ability to save our culture or civilization.

Except as regards this statement, the writer of the *Fortune* editorial hit the nail on the head. All too frequently the

[1] *Fortune Magazine,* January 1940.
[2] Chapter 7 pp. 112 f below.

voice of the Church is not a voice "not ourselves, in the existence of which we dare not disbelieve." It is more likely to be the voice of the preacher's own prejudices and human opinions, or the voice of the latest book he has read in psychology or sociology—if he has read any books.[3] But if we who are Christians are to speak with a voice "not ourselves" and if we are to be more than echoes of the best secular thinking, we have got to gain a whole new perspective, a whole new approach. We must learn to think in new categories of thought. In a word we must learn that to think Christianly is to think in ways so different that they will actually be revolutionary.

A young theological student volunteered to give a summer to the Maine Seacoast Mission. This Mission carries on an extensive work among the fishermen of the isolated communities of the Maine seacoast. The young seminarian arrived one night on a little island and held a church service. The church was full and the student did his best to conduct a fitting service and preach what he thought was an appropriate sermon. After the service was over, he was greeted by a great, hulking fisherman who fixed him with a penetrating eye and said, "Young man, you're going to hell!" The young preacher was somewhat taken aback. Without getting into theological quibbles about the nature and location of heaven and hell, he had good reason to presume he was headed in the other direction. Before he could make any

[3] Although I have made this criticism of preachers, it applies equally to the laity. In Protestantism the laity is as responsible for the Christian witness as is the clergy. Many a Protestant minister is thwarted because his people will not listen to an incisive Christian message. If I had any other criticism of the writer of the *Fortune* editorial, it would be that in so far as he is a Protestant layman, he criticized himself and did not realize it.

reply, however, the fisherman went on, "Don't you know that place in the Bible where it says, 'Ye are a peculiar people'?[4] Well, there ain't nothin' peculiar about you!"

The point is obvious. The fisherman had a true insight. To think Christianly is to think and act (for action stems from thought) in ways that are peculiarly different from the cenventional ways of thinking and acting, no matter how high-minded or well-intentioned the conventional ways may be. This, the Church by the large has not done, and until it does it will have nothing "saving" to say to our world. It will only continue to be an echo, which is hardly the function of the Church.

The Independence of Thinking Christianly

The first conviction that I stated at the beginning of this chapter was that "not only has Christianity something important to say to our world, it has the *only* important message to say." The failure of Christians and of churchmen to say the peculiar and unique Christian word, and their failure to speak with "a voice not our voice" is not a failure of the essential truth of the Christian Gospel. The failure is a human failure which arises from our tendency to identify the Gospel with our human desires and values which in turn arise from our cultural pattern. *The true Christian Gospel, however, is independent of all cultural patterns.* It can affect and has modified various cultures, but it cannot be identified with any particular culture. This cannot be overemphasized. If we Christians are to speak to our world with a "voice not

[4] I Peter 2:9 King James Version.

our voice," we must somehow achieve that independence. To do this will be hard—terribly hard. It means that we must learn to think Christianly, fully aware of the revolutionary implications of that phrase for many of our fondest hopes, dreams and aspirations. T. H. Huxley has said that a scientist sits down before the facts as a little child and follows where they lead regardless of what they may do to his own personal ideas or values. In like manner, Christians must learn to sit down before the facts of the Gospel and follow where they lead regardless of what they do to their ideas. It is my suspicion that they will lead to some surprisingly upsetting conclusions, but, they will also lead us to paths where we will have something really unique to say to our tragic world. Whenever Christians have emptied themselves as far as possible of their own human conceits and prejudices and humbled themselves before the God revealed in Our Lord Jesus Christ, God has not left them empty; instead they have found that in spite of their weakness they have had a word to say that was not their word but God's word. This is our faith. If this is not true the whole Christian enterprise is just so much "sound and fury, signifying nothing."

As I have already indicated, the task of thinking Christianly will be hard. Certainly I do not claim finality for ideas I have put forth in the rest of this book. I am a beneficiary of twentieth-century capitalistic America; I like its creature comforts and gadget conveniences as much as the next man. In much I am perplexed. Frankly I sometimes shrink from the implications of such thinking Christianly as I have been able to achieve so far. But there is no sin in being perplexed (only morons are unperplexed). As St.

Paul said: "We are perplexed but not unto despair." [5] The imperative is that we begin to think Christianly no matter how hard. This imperative is laid on us by the obvious needs of our world and by our faith in Christianity. As T. S. Eliot says, "The fact that a problem will certainly take a long time to solve, and that it will demand the attention of many minds for several generations, is no justification for postponing the study." [6]

The rest of this book is, then, an attempt by one Christian to begin to try to think Christianly about various aspects of our modern life, faith and practice. It is conceived as nothing more than a beginning and a pointing out of a direction in which I believe we must go. Before, however, going on to the further questions and as a final illustration of what I mean by thinking Christianly I should like to apply this thinking to the question which I raised earlier, namely, that of the atomic bomb.

As a political animal and as an American citizen I do not know any better than anyone else how best to control atomic energy. I have my opinions about what ought to be done. Probably they are not very good opinions for I do not really know much about atomic energy. Even if I did know what there is to know, I am not sure that I should know what is best to do. I find the whole business very perplexing and think it fortunate that the Lord has not seen fit to put me in the place of making the final decisions. Nevertheless as a citizen, I do have my opinions. If this were a political book I should not hesitate to express them, for

[5] II Corinthians 4:8.

[6] *The Idea of a Christian Society,* p. 1, Harcourt Brace and Co., 1940.

that would be my Christian duty as a citizen. Presumably my political opinions are somewhat colored by my Christian convictions, at least I hope they are. But, and this is the important point, that is something quite different from identifying my opinions with Christianity. To speak as a citizen involves expediency, compromise and a selfish desire for self-preservation. To speak as a Christian requires a whole new approach.

How does the Christian think about the atomic bomb when he thinks about it Christianly? It seems to me that he thinks something like this: First he recognizes that as a Christian he has nothing himself to say about it. He must seek "a voice not his voice," something outside of and independent of his own opinions, prejudices and cultural patterns. Consequently he turns to the Bible as the Word of God. (This of course does not guarantee complete objectivity for it is probably impossible to come to the Bible without some prejudice and preconceptions. Nevertheless for Christians the Bible does speak authoritatively and independently.) What does the Bible say? It says nothing about atomic energy *per se,* but it does say some very important things about the nature of the world and life. Some of the things it says are not particularly congenial to the modern mind. It says that the world is the creation of a God who is good, and that His creation is good. This means that atomic energy is also within the province of God and that He can and will use it for His good purposes. It says that God can and does make the wrath of men to praise Him. The Bible says nothing about saving any particular societies, cultural patterns or economic systems; rather, it says that all civilizations are under the judgment of His righteousness. It says

that all individuals, nations and civilizations die. It says further that the only group that does not die or cannot be destroyed until the end of the world is the fellowship of true believers which is the Body of Christ—The Church.[7] It says that for the Christian there is absolutely nothing to fear. As St. Paul put it: "Nay in all these things [including atomic energy or anything else that may be discovered] we are more than conquerors. . . . For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." [8]

In other words, for the Church to think and speak Christianly about atomic energy would not be for it to utter pompous but irrelevant pronouncements about how we must become Christian or destroy ourselves. Rather, it would point to a whole new attitude toward life in which the destruction of our world, if that is God's will, can be viewed with equanimity and without fear. The Word of God in the Bible makes it abundantly clear that the world will end some time. "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." [9] (Most of the Biblical descriptions of the end are rather catastrophic; they fit in strangely with the description of atomic power. I should not, however, push that point lest I be accused of Bibliolatry.) Some time the world must end. In principle, and this is a point Christians have forgotten—in principle it does not make one bit of difference

[7] See below, Chapter 7.
[8] Romans 8:37–39.
[9] Mark 13:32.

whether it ends by atomic destruction in our lifetime, or by collision with some heavenly body some millions of years from now, or by the slow cooling off of the planetary system also millions of years from now. (Personally this last alternative seems to me the least desirable, but that is really an irrelevant personal opinion.) The world must end, and God is good. As Christians this is what we know and all we need to know. It is also what we must say. The fact that the world may end in our lifetime may be exciting but it is ultimately unimportant. After all, the world ends for each one of us at our death anyhow.

It is in some such fashion that the Christian thinks and speaks about the atomic bomb as a Christian. I am quite aware that for many fine people such an approach is distasteful. I am aware that it raises a number of problems, such as whether this cuts the nerve of social action, and the relations of God's power to His goodness. I shall try to deal with these problems later.[10] Nevertheless, I have used this illustration deliberately because it seems to indicate rather well how radical real Christian thinking must be. The real questions are not what do we like or what do we dislike; the real questions are what does the Gospel say, what does it mean to think Christianly. Again, I do not have all the answers, for I am in the same dilemma as everyone else. I am convinced, however, that if we Christians are to speak to our confused generation with "a voice not our voice, but a voice coming from something not ourselves, in the existence of which we dare not disbelieve," we shall need to learn to assert the independence of the Christian religion. This is what thinking Christianly means.

[10] See Chapter 6.

2

The Importance of the Eternal

CERTAINLY ONE OF THE FIRST REQUIREMENTS FOR thinking Christianly is belief in God. Theoretically most people believe in God; actually they do not. By this I mean that there are not very many thorough-going intellectual atheists, for a consistent atheism is a very difficult philosophical system to maintain. Almost everyone believes in some sort of a God as a necessary proposition "to hold the universe together." But for most people, even many Christian people, God is very vague. The famous definition of the deacon who said that to him "God is an oblong blur" is typical. Relatively few people believe in a God who is constantly acting in history and who has a definite concern and will for them personally. As John Macmurray suggested in *Creative Society* there is a real distinction between believing in God and believing in believing in God. Most people believe in believing in God as a nice and perhaps necessary idea, but actually to believe in God who is dealing with them and shaping their destiny is a much more difficult thing.

There are a number of reasons for this lack of certainty about God's care for the individual which I shall not go into now. Among the reasons, of course, is honest intellectual

doubt. Since, however, this book is written for Christians and not non-Christians, I shall not argue for the existence of a God who acts, but assume it.[1] There is, however, one important but much neglected reason for this unbelief of which I do wish to speak: We have lost our sense of the reality of the eternal world. In other words, we have lost the sense of a "world" out of which God can operate, if I may put it that way. Modern man has become completely absorbed in the temporal, the mundane and secular. The eternal world, if it is believed in at all, is thought about as being so far away or so irrelevant that it need not be taken into consideration, and consequently a God, "a high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy" [2] may be all right poetically or philosophically, but He does not seem to have much bearing on how a man earns his bread and achieves his satisfactions.

The degree to which this secularization has gone on even among Christian people is both amazing and frightening. All our judgments of what is good are taken from a horizontal, this-worldly level. Intellectually we may make some provision for transcendent values, but actually and practically we want the stuff we can get our hands on. Success is success in terms of this world's measurable benefits, and failure is failure to achieve what we hoped for or wanted of this world's goods or acclaim. Even in church circles, success is measured in terms of quantity rather than of quality. We still talk about spiritual values; even the politicians and popular journals from time to time ring the

[1] Such argument as I might wish to give may be found in my *Faith of a Protestant,* The Macmillan Company, 1946.

[2] Isaiah 57:15.

changes on "spiritual values," but most of the talk is very vague. The term "spiritual values" today is just a good cliché. It arouses pleasant nostalgic sentiments and makes everyone feel pleasant, but seldom is any precise content put into it. Even the people who talk about spiritual values or an eternal world and think they believe in them do not really believe. Take for instance the question of death.

The question of immortality still makes a good subject for discussion. According to a Gallup poll I once saw, over ninety percent of the people still believe in some kind of existence beyond death. But for most people, at least for most who are not facing the prospect of their immediate death, it is not a very vital question; rather, faith in a future life is more or less academic and the more pleasant alternative to hold on a question which, they believe, has no final answer. Even most of the people who say that they believe in a life after death hasten to add, almost apologetically, "But of course I am more interested in this life. This life is what is important for me." From one point of view there is sound good judgment in asserting the importance of this life. As long as we are alive, this is where God has put us and our job is to live the life God intends for us where we find it. In this sense our present life is important—of inestimable importance. In another and equally important sense, however, this attitude reveals an overattachment to the temporal and a loss of the sense of the eternal. Actually most of us have gotten to the place where all our values, all our judgments, all the things we consider good, are good or valuable only insofar as they satisfy our material comfort or our worldly success. Anything else is considered bad. Think of the number of people, even good Christian people, who take it for granted that for any

but the very old or desperately ill, death is bad. Most people, even though they may claim to believe in immortality, assume that death, if not the worst evil, is still among the major evils; they assume that for a person to die at twenty is a most unfortunate happening and that such a person never has had a chance to fulfill his potentialities. I do not mean to minimize here the tragicness of death for those left behind who must live on without a loved one. To have to go on through life without a loved one can be real tragedy. That is a different question. But to assume that death is automatically bad for the person who dies is to reveal how completely our values are conditioned by this-worldly temporal judgments. It also reveals as well as any example I know our failure to think Christianly.

The simple fact is that we are absorbed in and, for all practical purposes, think and act in worldly terms. Our lives are spent in accumulating gadgets, comforts and worldly fame and security. Most of us would infinitely prefer $10,000 in the bank or a laudatory article in *Life* Magazine to a vision of God. We still sing in Church with gusto Luther's famous hymn:

> And though they take our life
> Goods, honor, kindred, wife,
> These things shall vanish all;
> The city of God remaineth.[3]

But we do not mean it. The last things in the world we want to give up are life, goods, honor, kindred. (In view of the

[3] It is significant that the new hymn books translate these harsh lines more softly:

> "Let goods and kindred go
> This mortal life also."

divorce rate "wife" does not seem so important—she at present is more easily replaceable.) We do care if these things should "vanish all"—witness our fear of atomic energy. And the chief reason why we care about all these things is that while it may be pleasant to sing in church about the permanence of the City of God it has no relevance to our lives as we live them. Consequently, except as a philosophical abstraction, God has no relevance to our mundane lives; there is no place for Him to operate in or from. No wonder Christianity is misunderstood. Christianity, if it stands for anything, stands for the permanence and reality of an eternal world. Whenever Christianity is reduced to a system of ethics alone it ceases to be Christianity. This does not mean that in Christian thought the mundane world has no importance and meaning; rather it gets its meaning from an eternal world. Before we can begin to think Christianly we must begin to think in terms of eternity.

Way down underneath, a great many people are unconsciously aware of this situation. In spite of their preoccupation with gadgets they know that gadgets do not satisfy. I shall not attempt to argue this point; it is obvious to any thoughtful person. The popularity of books on psychology and of psychiatrists, the rising divorce rate, the fear of the future and a long list of factors which anyone could complete indicate that we are not a happy generation. We work hard and we play hard too. There is something frantic about much of both our work and our play that is not a sign of health. Our generation knows that it has lost something but it does not know what it is or where to look for it. Sometimes we think about it a little. But it is hard to think

about and it also makes us uncomfortable and lonely. It is so much easier to say: "Let's go to a movie" or "Let's have a rubber of bridge." Then we shall not have to think about it. Yet all the time, way down underneath we know that the satisfactions we pursue most vigorously do not satisfy and that something is missing.

Poets are usually more sensitive that the rest of us. There is a poem by a modern poet, Theodore Spencer, which both expresses this malaise I have been trying to describe and points to the way out. It says, in part:

> We cannot know our world until we find
> A compass that can chart what world we know.
>
> What do we know? We are a kindly people,
> And if we see a wrong we try to right it.
> A boy run over in the street by a car
> Finds mothers, grandmothers, at once to help him;
> He's laid on cushions till the doctor comes,
> And family lace is used to wipe his cuts.
> We are very tender, most kind to physical pain.
> If our canaries die we are unconsoled.
> We go to church, we fumble in our pockets
> For coins to give to newsboys and to God;
> We make good coffee, we go to pleasant movies;
> At weddings our eyes are filled with simple tears.
> We like waffles and syrup; we praise gas,
> We praise coal, we praise inventiveness;
> We admire the mysterious men who work all day
> Holding test-tubes up against the light,
> Who will revolutionize the rubber industry.
> When we come home at night we kiss our wives
> But we do not see their faces; when we wake
> In the smart morning we are fresh for a new day,
> Because we know that in the bathroom cupboard

Are toothpaste, mouth wash, razor blades and Kleenex;
The subway takes us easily to our work.

"Is this our world? Or only half our world?"

II

Suppose a man came knocking at your door,
A man you'd never known, in a strange coat,
Using a set of words that weren't your words,
Speaking in a range of sound more wide than yours,
Whose hat shaded eyes more deep than yours;
Suppose this man, standing on your doorstep,
Should say, "Hello; good evening. Would you please
Tell me the time?" You'd say, "Seven o'clock."
And if he'd say, "But whose time? Yours or mine?"
What would you do? Ask him in? Tell him
To wait until you'd dialed the usual number
That always tells the time? What would you do?
Perhaps he might be satisfied and leave,
Pulling his hat over his deep eyes,
And say, "Thank you," when you'd said, "It's seven."
In that case you could smoke your cigarette,
Turn on the radio, say goodnight to May,
And brush your teeth before you went to bed.

But if the stranger with the strange words
Could not be satisfied, and did not leave,
What would you do? What if he said again,
"Whose time?" Where would you look? Where would
you go?
The encyclopedia would not help you (even
If you paid up the last installment on it);
The mechanical female telephone voice would only
Fool you with accuracy, saying, "Seven o'clock."
Suppose he said, "What is seven o'clock?"
Suppose he said, "Seven o'clock is forever,

> And forever is only a word for seven o'clock,
> And seven o'clock is now." Suppose he said
> "Seven o'clock is now." What would you do? [4]

"Good coffee . . . pleasant movies . . . toothpaste, mouth wash, razor blades and Kleenex. . . . Is this our world or only half our world?" . . . "Seven o'clock is now and seven o'clock is forever. . . ."

What time is it? As I write these words it is 1.25 P.M. Central Standard time, September 24, 1947. What is 1:25 P.M. Central Standard time, September 24, 1947? In one sense it is a moment in the passage of time which means that all of us are that much nearer death. In another sense 1:25 P.M. C.S.T. September 24, 1947, is nothing more than a label for our convenience. Had the people in this state wanted Daylight Saving, it would now be 2:25 P.M. although it would still be the same moment. Indeed, a few miles from where I am it is 2:25 P.M. and a few miles west it is 12:25 P.M. One-twenty-five P.M. means nothing except as a label for our convenience. If we all agreed it might just as well be called 5 P.M. or 3 A.M. or . . . seven o'clock! One-twenty-five is now and now is forever, for we can only live now. This means that *now is part of eternity* if we can only grasp it. It means further than there are some "things" that are more real, more permanent, more significant than the desk on which I write or the refrigerator that keeps my food.

It is terribly important that we try to grasp the full significance of the eternal for life. One reason why we live such flat, horizontal (and therefore confused) lives is that we have lost this quality, or in so far as we do believe in an

[4] From *Enlistment* in *An Act of Life,* by Theodore Spencer, Harvard University Press.

eternal world it is so far distant or remote as to have no relevance. But Christianity properly understood asserts the permanence and the reality of the eternal. It is, so to speak, where God lives, although no man, not even with the greatest telescope, can determine its locus.

If Christians are to become independent of the cultural patterns of our day and are really to think and speak Christianly they must begin by recognizing that no matter how important this world is, the eternal world is more important. Once we recapture this awareness of the eternal, faith in a God who acts will be much more understandable and natural, and we shall have a perspective from which we can understand and interpret our world and also our own lives.

The Relevance of the Eternal for Faith in Christ

Once we recapture the awareness of the eternal, faith in Christ will become more understandable and more natural too; indeed, except in terms of an eternal world over and beyond this world, the idea of a Christ makes no sense at all. It is to the "Greeks," ancient and modern, "foolishness." By the term Christ I mean more than merely the last name of a man named Jesus who lived in Palestine some nineteen hundred years ago. By the term Christ I mean what the New Testament means—the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Incarnation of God.

For many moderns the idea that God could or would incarnate Himself once and for all in a man, Jesus of Nazareth, is a very difficult idea to accept. Unfortunately, and this is especially true of modern liberal Protestantism, many people are taken into church membership who do not believe in

Christ in the New Testament sense, and even more unfortunately some ministers are ordained who do not believe it.[5] There are various reasons for this retreat, but mostly they all boil down to the impact of the empirical, rational, scientific method. A certain charity and understanding should be extended to those honest people who, no matter how misguided they may be, have sincerely tried to construct and preserve a Christianity without a Christ. Forgetting the reality of the eternal world and accepting the assumptions of scientific materialism which by its very nature is limited to this world, they were honestly trying to preserve some of the values of the Christian faith. And their attempt made it possible for some sincere souls to hang on to some religious convictions when all seemed lost. They held some turrets inside the fort of faith until others more aware of the limitations of scientific naturalism could come to the rescue. Credit should be given where credit is due; but when all is said and done, their position is an impossible one. If there is no Christ, there is no Christianity worth bothering about.

The simple fact is that the question of the Incarnation or the Christhood of Jesus is not merely another academic question for theologians to split hairs over; it is the most important question there is. The answer to this question not only determines whether Christianity stands or falls; it also determines whether there is any ultimate basis of hope for mankind—consequently any ultimate hope for you and me.

If Jesus were not the Christ, then Christianity is just an-

[5]"If the blind lead the blind both shall fall into the ditch." Matthew 15:14. No wonder the Church has failed to "speak with a voice not ourselves"!

other human scheme—another desperate human attempt to give meaning to what is actually a meaningless universe. It may be a rather glorious attempt, but that is all it is, and it is doomed to futility, for it does not fit the facts of life. Ultimately it has no more significance or validity than any other human attempt such as Stoicism, or for that matter even Voodooism. It has no objective validity. It certainly cannot claim to speak "with a voice not our voice . . . in the existence of which we dare not disbelieve." Subjectively some of us in western civilization may prefer it, for we have been nurtured in its *ethos*. We personally may think Christianity superior to all other schemes of thought. Psychologists and sociologists can tell us, as some of them do, that our preference is due to our environmental conditioning. If this be true, then although we may like it better, we have no basis for saying that Christianity is actually better than Hinduism or even Nazism. If Jesus was merely a man, there is no objective reason for saying his teachings are superior to Hitler's. From the point of view of the hypothetical, disinterested man from Mars, the devoted Gestapo Nazi was just as "good" and just as "right" as the most devoted and sacrificial Christian saint. The only real reason there is for claiming that Christianity is superior to Nazism or any other "ism" is that it actually represents a revelation from God. And there is absolutely no reason for making this claim unless Jesus was more than just a man—unless he was God Incarnate. The people who have given up the Incarnation while trying to maintain Christianity have not faced the full consequences of their position.

Some critic may well say at this point: "You are really insisting on the Incarnation in order to protect your faith,

but you have not really demonstrated its necessity." If what has been said so far were all there is to say, there might be some truth in this criticism, although the critic would still have to find some other basis, besides personal preference, for preferring Christianity. I believe he could not. Be that as it may, there is a more important reason for insisting on the Incarnation.

There is a widespread popular trend today which says that the basic element in our Lord's teachings is love. This is a mistaken interpretation. Although the importance of love both in Jesus' teaching and example cannot be underestimated, it is not basic. The basic quality, both in Jesus' teaching and example, the quality which validates and undergirds the love is *trust*. Important as love is, and it is very important, the reason for loving according to Our Lord is that God demands it and that God, the Creator of the Universe, is trustworthy. Jesus could and did advocate the way of love not because love is pragmatically useful but because God demands love and because He can be trusted to sustain ultimately the lover, no matter how great temporal sacrifices are involved, bringing him to victory.

It is impossible to overestimate the stupendousness of this conception. It means that the Creator of the Universe, the Being who ordains the movements of the stellar universes hundreds of millions of light years away, can be trusted to sustain you and me when we submit ourselves to Him. How do we actually know this to be a fact and not just a human hypothesis or wish-thinking? We know it only because of the Incarnation. Nowhere else in all the history of the world, or in all the universe have we so far been able to discover, do we have evidence for such an assertion. But how do we know

that the Incarnation is a fact and not a human invention? We know it because of the total work including the Resurrection of Our Lord. Not just Jesus' teachings, great though they are, not just the quality of his life, which was beautiful indeed, not just the courage and nobility of his death, inspiring as it was, but his total work, including and (I share the New Testament opinion) most important of all, his Resurrection. Our Lord trusted God not only unto death but also unto worldly defeat, shame and apparent failure. No purely human being could do this, for no purely human being knows God as well as that. Only God Himself could make such a revelation, such a demonstration of Himself. And God demonstrated His trustworthiness in the Resurrection. In the Resurrection God showed Himself to be a God who brings victory out of defeat, life out of death, good out of evil—in a word, a God who can be trusted absolutely. This is the only basis there is for practicing the law of love. Certainly to practice the law of love with any seriousness will get us into all kinds of unpleasant and even tragically defeating (in this world's terms) situations. If virtue is the only reward of virtuousness, in a meaningless universe that ends with death it is "pretty small pickings."

The *sine qua non,* then, of Christian faith is the Resurrection. As St. Paul put it: "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain and your faith is vain." [6] I am not going to argue here extensively for the fact of the Resurrection. I shall only say that the historicity of the Resurrection is as well attested as almost any other fact of ancient history and that did it not counter to the prevalent thought patterns of our secular, materialistic culture, there would

[6] I Cor. 15:14.

be no difficulty in accepting its historicity. Admittedly, however, recognizing the facts of the Incarnation and Resurrection depends on a different type of thinking from conventional thinking.

There is a prior question which is more germaine. Prior to the question of either the Incarnation or the Resurrection (the two are inseparable) is the question of eternity. If this world is all there is, then of course there is no place where Christ could have "come from" at the Resurrection; indeed, there was no place for him to "come from" in the first place, and there is no place for God. If, however, this world is not all there is, and if there is an eternal world and a God who dwells in it, then it is utterly natural and normal to expect that such a God would reveal Himself in history in terms man can most easily understand, that is, He would incarnate Himself in a man who suffered all the defeat, frustration and despair man has to face and still come out victorious. Indeed, once we understand the reality and importance of eternity, any other position is less reasonable. This, at any rate, is what Christianity asserts to be true. Jesus was not merely Jesus of Nazareth, although he certainly was that; he was Jesus the Christ, the Incarnation of God who revealed how God overcomes the frustrations of human existence. In Jesus Christ the Eternal invaded the Temporal and revealed that the Temporal only has meaning and significance when it is seen from the point of view of the Eternal. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." And that Word said: "I am the resurrection and the life. . . . Abide in me. . . . Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." [7] Such statements obviously make no sense at all and their

[7] John 1:14; 11:25; 15:4; 16:33.

author obviously belongs in an insane asylum if Jesus was merely another man.

The Relevance of the Eternal for the Church

The point of view of the Eternal is also the only point of view from which we can really understand the role of the Church in history.

God's revelation of Himself in an historical man, Jesus Christ, was brief, at most only a few short years, but it was complete. It was given once and for all. There is no need to repeat it or to have a new revelation, for there is nothing more to reveal. God demonstrated His nature, His intentions and His trustworthiness toward those who put their trust in Him (as much as human beings need to know for their salvation and fulfillment). Those who talk of a new revelation or of another "greater Jesus" coming sometime are talking the impossible. If there were to be a different revelation or a "greater Jesus," it would mean that the Incarnation in Jesus Christ was either inaccurate or insufficient and therefore that God is not trustworthy. Christianly speaking, this is impossible. In the New Testament, however, there is a clear indication that there will be false Christs and false Messiahs, and we have seen some in our own time. There will always be others. The revelation of God was once, complete, and for all time; it was a unique invasion of the Temporal by the Eternal which God in his infinite wisdom and mercy has granted us. When Christ "returns" again, it will be the end and consummation of history.

The revelation of God in the Incarnation, then, was complete but brief. It ended some nineteen hundred years ago

now, but this does not mean that God has left us or withdrawn Himself from us. If God cares enough about people to enter into our life and suffer as He did in Jesus Christ, it is most natural to assume that He would provide a continuing revelation of Himself for all subsequent generations. This He has done in the Church.[8] The Church of Christ is the vehicle whereby the Incarnation is represented to men until the end of time. Thus the Church must be understood as the continuing "invasion of the Temporal by the Eternal." Only in these terms does the Church become anything more than a reasonably good, man-made, social institution, such as the Rotary Club or the League of Women Voters.

Happily today, there is a rising sense of churchmanship among Christians, but too much of it is a kind of desperate tightening of the belt originating in a fear of what will happen to the Church, and too little of it understands why the Church is different from all human institutions. Sad to relate there are still too many within the Church who see it only as another good social institution which defends the conventional morality these people happen to believe in and like. Again, obviously as long as we think in terms of one world instead of two, as long as we fail to understand the reality of an eternal world that overarches this world, the Church cannot be anything more than a man-made institution which we protect and foster because we happen to like it. Certainly it can have no right to speak with a "voice not our voice." When, however, we grasp the reality of the eternal world, then we can see the role of the Church in a

[8] Primarily, of course, God continues to reveal Himself through the Holy Spirit, but I am not writing about that here. The Church is an expression of, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

new light and, thinking Christianly, we can see its true light. Just as Jesus Christ is the Incarnation, "the Word made flesh," so the Church is the Body of Christ, the representative of the Eternal in the Temporal.

On this basis, the question: "What will happen to the Church?" is a question which reveals how far the questioner has failed to think Christianly. If the Church were only a human institution, then the question might be legitimate. But the Church is not a human institution. It is God's institution. This is the most reasonable interpretation there is. For if there be a God who dwells in Eternity and who loves men enough to reveal Himself in Jesus Christ, the most reasonable thing to expect is that such a God would provide a means whereby His revelation and His concern for men would be carried on down through the ages. The answer to the question: "What will happen to the Church?" is: "Nothing can hurt or destroy it!" The Church is the only institution about which such a statement can truthfully be made.

To make such an assertion about the nature of the Church should not blind us to the limitations of the churches. The Church is the indestructible God-ordained Body of Christ; the churches are made up of people like you and me who have prejudices, partial perspectives and inordinate lusts for power and for pleasure. Any church which confesses that Jesus is the Christ [9] and recognizes all others who make the same confession as brothers is rightfully a part of The Church. But it is also always, as far as this world is concerned, a partly human institution subject to all the

[9] This is the significance of Peter's Confession. See Matt. 16:13–20, Mk. 8:27–30; Lk 9:18–22.

corruptions of human finiteness. Further it is true that sometimes some churches can become so corrupt that they may feel the judgment of God. This has happened a number of times in history, such as in the Protestant Reformation which was God's judgment upon the Roman Church, the Russian Revolution which was His judgment on the Russian Church, and the whole curse of sectarianism which is His judgment upon Protestantism, to cite only the more outstanding examples.

The real question is not: "What will happen to the Church?" The real question is "What will happen to my church?" "Is the church to which I belong making a true witness and confession, so that it can rightfully claim to be a part of The Church?" More important still: "What am I doing about it? Am I living a life which makes me and my church eligible for membership in The Church?" On this score, the first thing for all of us to do is to confess our sin and failure. The simple truth is that our Christian witness is colored and all too frequently overcome by our conscious and unconscious prejudices, cultural, economic, racial and social. In all this we must trust God to judge us by our intentions rather than by our accomplishments. But this is one of the reasons why it is so desperately important that we find an independent basis for thinking Christianly, and the only independent basis there is lies in the viewpoint which sees the Church as the continuing Incarnation, the principle of eternity in time, which passes judgment on the churches and at the same time enters the churches making them true representatives of The Church when they accept the judgment.

3

The Practice of Faith *

Faith Is Hard

TO PRACTICE THE LIFE OF FAITH IS HARD, FAR HARDER than most people realize. By this I do not mean that to achieve an intellectual faith, on the one hand, nor a superstitious faith, on the other, is hard. But really to live a life of Christian faith is hard.

An intellectual faith is a relatively easy achievement for most people. Almost everybody believes in some sort of God. A God seems to be a necessary presupposition for most basic questions. To believe in some kind of a God actually raises fewer intellectual problems than to believe that the universe and the emergence of *homo sapiens* is the result of blind chance and an unaccountable series of fortunate accidents. But it is one thing to believe in God as a necessary intellectual proposition and quite another to expect Him to act in the daily routine of our lives. Christian faith is something considerably more than an intellectual assent to the idea of God, although it naturally includes such an assent.

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Neither is Christian faith a superstition, although it is frequently confused with superstition by those outside the faith and all too frequently by many inside. Among the less rigorously intellectual, and this constitutes the great majority, a superstitious faith is also easy. So many unexplainable things can and do happen to the average person in the course of a lifetime that a system of superstitious interpretations becomes quite natural. But a real Christian faith is not a superstition. The distinction is that a superstition believes that by fulfilling (or failing to fulfill) certain more or less legal requirements or formulae, fate, or the gods, or the saints, or even God Himself can be manipulated for man's benefit, chiefly in terms of this world, whereas Christian faith, while it trusts God absolutely, knows that God can never be manipulated. Christian faith is the faith that God really acts in history and in the details of our mundane lives and that all His actions are good. But it recognizes that any attempt to control God is blasphemy.[1]

To put this kind of Christian faith into practice is hard. The failure to recognize how hard faith is is one of the causes of our failure to think Christianly. It is one of the sources of misunderstanding which cause much of the modern religious difficulty. Although I hope it is obvious from what has already been said that I am a churchman who believes that it is impossible to live the Christian life apart from some Christian Church, in all honesty it must be confessed that our churches are largely to blame for this situation. Ministers and priests talk about faith and exhort people

[1] Since I suspect that most of those who read this will be of "the intellectual faith" group rather than "the superstitious faith" group, I shall not deal with superstition further.

to have faith, but all too frequently they imply that faith is easy. "All you have to do is merely believe," they say. Perhaps that is all you do have to do to have an intellectual faith, but belief does not become a convincing, working belief until it ends in action. That is not easy. To believe intellectually may be easy, but to risk my security or the security of those dependent on me, to live from day to day taking willingly life as it comes, to accept misfortune as well as fortune as coming from God and all therefore good, is a terribly difficult achievement. Really to believe—to believe that the frustration of my hopes is also a part of God's trustworthiness and care for me is no easy thing. Christian faith is hard, far harder than many of our religious leaders imply that it is.

There are at least two reasons why the Christian faith, in the sense that is here presented, is hard for modern people to accept. One is that as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews put it: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen." [2] But our generation is exceedingly skeptical of what it cannot see. We agree with Dorothy in the book *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* when she said: "A kiss on the hand may feel very good but a diamond tiara lasts forever." In the Sermon on the Mount, Our Lord tells us: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." [3] We reply that unquestionably this is poetically beautiful, but when all is said and done we are not lilies. We have mouths to feed, children to educate and the rainy

[2] Hebrews 11:1.
[3] Matthew 6:28, 29.

day to prepare for. Such beautiful expressions are pleasant to listen to in church, and we like to hear them once in a while when everything is going well, just as we like to hear statements about "getting back to spiritual values." When the pinch comes, however, and we are faced with an actual choice—say, between a better paying job or a spiritual principle—most of us will let God take care of the lilies while we find very good reasons for taking the better job. For most twentieth-century people, even people who try to be Christian, this world and its values are more real and more significant than any spiritual or eternal values. One of the most revealing aberrations of American thinking is that we stamp on our coins, "In God we trust."

This preoccupation with the temporal is one of the reasons why faith is hard. Christianly speaking, we ought to live in terms of the eternal. But this world is too much with us. Being the finite creatures that we are, we are concerned with creature comforts, and none of us can completely escape this condition, certainly not easily. Even the churches fail to achieve a real faith perfectly. One of the tragedies of our day and one of the reasons for the failure of the Church to speak authoritatively is the number of churchmen who talk about faith in God but put their trust in political power, or ritualistic formulae, or popular programs.

Faith And What Is Good

A second reason why faith is hard will be more difficult for many good people to accept. It reveals how completely revolutionary thinking Christianly can be. This reason is that our ideas of what is good and what is bad are superficial

and confused. We have mistaken ideas of what is good for us.

Strange as it may seem to say it, the simple fact is that what really constitutes the good and what really constitutes the bad is more difficult to determine, more complex and less certain than most of our simple moralizing would indicate. The great Russian writer Gogol once observed: "It is sad not to see any good in goodness." [4] Perhaps such a statement is too pessimistic, but certainly all of us are aware of how frequently good intentions turn out badly, and how bad intentions frequently have surprisingly fortunate results. All of us know "good people" who are most unattractive, and "bad people" who are most attractive. Indeed, it often seems as though the "bad people" were more attractive than the "good people." Goodness, however, if there is any sense to life, *ought* to be attractive, and badness *ought* to be unattractive. There is something mixed up here that is not solved by simple moralizing. Since this point is highly controversial, it needs some further amplification and illustration.

First, an illustration from the social area: In the middle of the nineteen thirties there was a very strong pacifist movement in England. What the reader may personally think of the wisdom of pacifism is beside the point. From the point of view of sincerity, motive, intention and goal (and this is the only point of view from which Christian judgment can be given), the movement was motivated by the highest Christian principles. It was led by the late Rev. Dick Shepard, a Christian saint if there ever was one. The move-

[4] I am indebted to *Destiny of Man* by Nicholas Berdyaev for this quotation and for some of these ideas.

ment reached its climax at the time Mussolini was getting ready to launch his Ethiopian campaign. Finally the movement brought about a plebiscite in England in which slightly over 11,500,000 adults voted that they would never support king or country in war. Mussolini wanted Ethiopia and he knew that the real obstacle to his ambition was not the League of Nations (that, as he early demonstrated, could be by-passed). The real obstacle was the British Navy. The British Navy alone stood between him and Ethiopia. Would Britain risk war and use its navy or not? That was the real question for Mussolini. As John Macmurry has observed, Mussolini took one look at Britain and rightly concluded that a nation of that size with 11,500,000 active pacifists would never order its navy to stop him! What began as a sincere Christian endeavor to do good, to prevent bloodshed and stop war, diabolically produced the diametrically opposite results.

Consider the question from the personal side. Lying, stealing, forgery, murder and breaking the law are wrong and bad and are generally considered "sins." At least so we believe and so we teach our children. Yet in the underground movements of Europe during the War there were fine people, many of them sincere Christians, who did all these things. In fact, frequently these "sins" became actual virtues; perhaps they should not have, but the simple fact remains that they did. One of the finest Christian souls that I happen to know, a man whose Christian faith has been an inspiration to me and to many others, was in the French underground movement. He, himself, did not have to commit murder, but he aided and abetted others who did, and he lied, stole, forged, misrepresented and generally broke

the law. The record of the Christian churches in the war, both in occupied Europe and in Germany, is a heroic record of which we are proud, as we should be, but in order to keep their Christian witness alive both the churches and churchmen continually practiced most of the things we call morally bad.

One more illustration. For many years I have worked with college students. Some time ago a young G. I. veteran came into my office. Like many others he had married a sweet girl before going to war, when they were both too young. For some three years they had been able to live on war and romance. But now he was back at college and they were faced with the humdrum routine of daily living together. Their marriage was headed for the rocks. In the next couple of months I spent hours with those two young people, and finally everything seemed to work out. They decided they did love each other and that they would stick together. They were very happy in this decision. Since both of them had slightly more than conventional Christian interests and since I knew that the man's uncertainty regarding his future career was one of the problems, I suggested that they go to a Student Christian Movement week-end conference on vocations which was coming up soon. The husband thought it an excellent idea although, because his wife was working, she could not get there until the last day. At the conference I noted that the G. I. was not taking much part and was spending most of his time with the grounds staff. I did not see either of them again until after Commencement; then I saw the wife. She told me that her husband had met a girl on the grounds staff at the Conference, and now he wanted to get a divorce. I have had many reactions from Student

Christian conferences but never one like that. What had seemed the very best Christian procedure to stabilize that boy and his marriage had done just the opposite.

What is really good and what is really bad is not so easy to determine. This raises very serious questions regarding the relativity of ethics which I shall deal with later.[5] At the moment I simply make this point to throw light on the question of living the Christian faith. The second reason why faith is hard is because we are frequently mixed up regarding what is the truly good and what is the truly bad.

Most of us when we say a thing is good mean that it is what we consider good *on our own terms*; it it what we, in the private judgment of our own minds, have decided is good. Usually it is something we consider good for our comfort, or our prestige, or our worldly success. Contrariwise, the things we call bad are the things which interfere with our comfort and our desires—pain, loss of prestige, failure, death. (This is one of the places that the this-worldly, secular values most dominate us. Our judgments of what is good and what is bad are made almost entirely in terms of this world.) When a man makes a success of something, we congratulate him. Perhaps we should, for we all like and probably need some praise from our fellowmen. But perhaps from an eternal perspective what we call success may not actually be as truly successful as we like to think. We all know people who have had too much success—the self-made man who worships his maker—and they are insufferable. Actually we learn little if anything from success. Success tends to confirm us in our own self-sufficiency and

[5] See Chapter 6, pp. 80 f.

conceit. As Arnold J. Toynbee eloquently points out in his *Study of History,* the tragedy in the history of civilizations is that the Creative Minority which successfully meets one challenge to its society seldom if ever meets the second challenge successfully, for it insists upon applying the old, formerly successful formula to a new and different situation. The same is true with individuals. The Christian psychotherapist, Dr. Fritz Kunkel, frequently ends his lectures something like this: "And now may you go out and make terrible mistakes!" or "And now may you go out and fail badly!" We can learn from failures. We usually learn nothing from our successes except, perhaps, arrogance. About the most difficult human achievement is to achieve real success and remain decently humble. This suggests that all our conventional patterns of what is good and what is bad are mixed up. We do not know what is really good or bad for us. What we call good may not be what God calls good. What seems to us unadulterated tragedy may be a part of God's ultimate scheme which is good and therefore good for us.

This position admittedly has implications which are very upsetting for our conventional morality. It is a hard doctrine to accept. But it again illustrates what I mean by the revolutionary character of thinking Christianly. Actually from the Christian, that is, from the Biblical, point of view it is not as revolutionary as it appears. It has a sound Biblical basis. To take more or less at random some illustrations from the Old and New Testaments: When Joseph was sold into slavery into Egypt, it must have seemed pretty bad to him, yet actually the end result was the exaltation of Joseph and the preservation of his family and the historic Hebrew group.

This was good even in temporal terms. Again, it must have seemed unmitigated tragedy to Hosea when he discovered his wife's infidelity; however, the result was that Hosea learned love, mercy, and forgiveness, not only as possibilities for himself, but as attributes of God. Out of what seemed evil God brought forth good, and the world has never been the same since. Once more, the Babylonian Exile and the Fall of Jerusalem constituted about as "bad" a time in the history of a people as one could ask for. The temple of their God destroyed, their king killed and their country devastated, the Jews were deported into a strange and foreign land. Yet out of that misery, God led hardier souls like the unknown prophet of Isaiah 40–56 to see the meaning of monotheism, the role of vicarious suffering, and the universality of God.

Similarly in the New Testament, the early Christians who witnessed the stoning to death of Stephen must have found it exceedingly difficult to see any good in that event; it was a very black day for them. However, Stephen's martyrdom compelled the Christians to break their ties with Judaism and to scatter throughout the Roman Empire. It ended the attempt to make Christianity simply a reform movement within Judaism and led directly to the universalization of Christianity. And when Saul, "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" [6] started for Damascus, the Christians must have quaked with fear, but on that trip Saul had his vision which changed him from a persecutor into the greatest Christian defender the Faith has ever had. Supremely, of course, is the case of our Lord Jesus Christ. From every human point of view His cruci-

[6] Acts 9:1.

fixion was completely bad. Had any of us stood on Calvary that first Good Friday, and had we known anything of His life, we should have said that His crucifixion was absolutely bad with no good in it. It was unjust and it was unfair; no human rationalization could make it seem right. Apparently our Lord thought so too, for He cried out in His agony and despair, "My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken me?" [7] But today, looking back on that moment in the light of the subsequent Resurrection, we see that it was not really bad but only appeared bad. Indeed, it was the best and most glorious moment of history. Had there been no Crucifixion, there could have been no Resurrection. Men would still be stumbling blindly for a hope that had no historical reality. What from every human standard of judgment was completely bad, from God's point of view was good. God made good to come out of it.

This understanding should throw light on the problem of achieving a practical Christian faith for everyday life. However, it is hard, especially for twentieth-century Americans flushed with undreamed-of power and with victory, and confident that a competitive free enterprise system is the *summum bonum* of political wisdom. It is terribly hard for an individual (or a nation) to admit that he does not know what is best for his own good. For Americans it is doubly hard, for even the humblest American has a sense of power and self-confidence which he absorbs unconsciously from his culture. To make such an admission requires a humility that is alien to our whole way of life. Yet it is the absolutely necessary first step to understanding the Christian faith and achieving the unanxious life.

[7] Mark 15:34; Matthew 27:46.

Faith and the Capacity to Wait

In ordinary everyday mundane life, what does this Christian way of faith mean? It means something very different from an intellectual assent to a set of propositions; it means the capacity to trust God and therefore to trust life and all that it brings. It is the abiilty to admit that we do not know what is ultimately good for us, and to be willing to wait for God to reveal His will for us through prayer, worship and circumstance. Being willing to understand God speaking to us through circumstance is especially important. It means that we recognize that the Cross which comes to us, even though it may appear a very tragic and defeating Cross, is not really bad, is not the final word, but that beyond every Cross there is a Resurrection for those who trust God. Above all, in our time of confusion, it means the capacity to wait for God to act. T. S. Eliot has some wise words:

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love for the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought for you are not ready for thought;
So the darkness shall be the light and the stillness the dancing.[8]

Two things remain to be said. One is that, as this position implies, there are quasi-fatalistic elements in Christianity. Christianity is not absolutely fatalistic; rather it is what might better be called "quasi-fatalistic." It is not completely fatalistic because a man is always free to defy God, to follow his own desires, to worship himself and his own creations,

[8] From *East Coker* in *Four Quartets,* Harcourt Brace and Co.,. 1943.

although such defiance and self-deification always bring with them their own frustration. In the last analysis a man must conclude whether all the things that happen to him in the course of a lifetime are the result of blind chance without reason or purpose (and then this life becomes a mad desperate struggle to beat the game, ending in the ultimate frustration of death), or whether life and all that happens is, in spite of mystery, under the providence of a God who is good. Christian faith lives by the latter assumption. The doctrine of predestination found in St. Paul, St. Augustine and John Calvin is a hard, hard doctrine which many of us find repulsive, but, however repulsive some of its applications may be, it basically tries to express a true Christian insight, namely, that God is in control of all life.[9]

Secondly, to say that Christian faith means to wait for God to act is not to say that we merely sit back, let the world go to pot, and do nothing. To wait in terms of Christian faith means that we do all the things that come to hand, do all that we can in the situation we are in under the light of the Will of God as we understand it, but we do these things without a sense of finality. We do what we see needs to be done but with a sense of expecting and a sense of waiting for God to act. While we do our best, for that is what God requires of us, we do not worry about the result of our efforts. We confidently let God take care of the results. And God will take care of the results (they may be very different from what we expected) or else the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is an illusion. If our efforts fail it may be God's rebuke, although no less a sign of His love, or it may be only

[9] This question will be considered in more detail later in connection with Prayer. See pp. 54 f below.

an apparent failure and, on a larger plan than we can understand, a great success.

Lord,
Why should it be
So hard to see
Thy will for me?

This dream
This splendid thing,
That in my brain is singing
Night and day . . .
Cameth it from Thee?
Or is it
Just my vain imagining
Born of my own conceits blown high?
Lord, I want to know
I pray,
But still Thou dost not say.
Why?

Long have I prayed, Lord,
But still
Am in the dark.
Unless—
Unless this be Thy will:
That I should try
And if there follows
Some success,
Thine answer: Yes
And if I fail . . . ?
Also Thine answer heard
This dream was not Thy word.[10]

[10] From *Out of the Depths* by W. Burnet Easton Jr., *Theology Today,* Vol. III, No. 2.

To live by the Christian faith is hard. The writer knows very well how much easier it is to write about than it is to practice. It requires an awareness of the reality of the eternal world which is extremely difficult in our times. But in so far as we approximate it, we approximate the unanxious quality of life that frees us for really creative effort. It produces the sublime nonchalance of faith which is the first fruit of Christianity. Best of all, as many can testify, although we do not reach perfection, as we start down the narrow road that leads to abundant life, the Grace of God meets us in unexpected places, and miracles—the only miracles worth bothering about—do happen.

4

Prayer

IT IS OBVIOUS THAT IF WE ARE GOING TO ACHIEVE ANYthing like the practical living faith that I have tried to express in the previous chapter we must make prayer a practical reality. It is with considerable timidity that I start this chapter, for I am a very mundane person and in no sense a mystic, and there are many, many gaps in my own prayer life. I attempt it at all, partly because prayer is obviously a part of the position I am expressing, and partly because the very fact that I am not a mystic may, by God's grace, enable me "to speak to the condition" of people most of whom are not mystics either.

Obstacles to Prayer

As I see it, there are three groups of people who do not pray.[1] Some people do not pray because they feel self-sufficient. There is nothing that I, or anyone else, can say to such

[1] By praying I do not mean what might be called "foxhole prayers," the occasional desperate prayers made when every other resource has been tried and failed; I mean the habit of continual prayer that becomes a regular part of one's life. "Foxhole prayers" probably have some value but I am not interested in that question now.

a person. Certainly prayer, and indeed the whole Christian faith, will seem ridiculous to the self-sufficient person. Christianity can never begin to make sense until a person begins to recognize his own insufficiency. There are two other groups, however, to whom something can be said. One is the group who have tried praying but for whom it has not worked; the other is the group who, while they say they believe in some sort of a God, do not believe in a God who is personally concerned with them or who can or will answer their prayers in the concrete. Then there are some people who are in both these groups at once, for many have arrived in the second group by way of the first. Let us take the first group first.

There are many fine people who have made a sincere attempt at prayer but who have failed to "get anything out of it"—or so they thought. Perhaps they prayed for something quite sincerely and unselfishly and still did not get it. After enough of these seemingly futile experiences most people have had more than enough! Life is too hurried and complex to allow them to spend a lot of time on a spiritual discipline that has no observable results. Consequently they either stop praying entirely or shift to occasional meditation which they call prayer although it is not. (Valuable as meditation may be as a method of self-examination and of straightening out our thoughts it is not prayer until we recognize that we are in the presence of a God who is communicating to us.) Pretty soon even meditation becomes too rigorous a discipline for most people. After all, it is only a kind of pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps. We tend to employ it only when confronted by a particularly confusing situation. By this time it ceases to be even meditation

and is little more than a hurried attempt to reach a decision no whit different from the method used by a completely non-religious person. There are a good many people who have gone through this process. They themselves may not deny the validity of prayer; indeed, they may even wish that they could make prayer work. But it does not work for them, and it has gradually dropped out of their lives because after trial it did not get them what they wanted or expected. Their problems originated in what is called unanswered prayer.

The first comment which needs to be made is that there is a lot of misunderstanding both about the function of prayer and what constitutes answers to prayer. To take the latter question first, Christianly speaking there is no such thing as an unanswered prayer. The answer, however, may be very definitely: "No!" For some strange reason, when a person asks his earthly father for something and his father says: "No!" that person does not say that his father did not answer him (he is more likely to say, "the old man says 'No!' "); yet when we ask God for something and He says "No!" we say "my prayer is unanswered." This is inconsistent. "No" is just as much, although perhaps less pleasant, an answer as "Yes," whether it be from a person or from God. It is important to understand that just because God says "No" it does not mean that He has not answered us nor has ceased to care for us. Wrote Tagore: "My desires are many and my cry is pitiful, but ever didst Thou save me by hard refusals and this strong mercy has been wrought into my life through and through." [2]

[2] Quoted in *The Meaning of Prayer* by Harry Emerson Fosdick, p. 125, Association Press.

The supreme example, of course, of the answer of "No" which was a very real answer is the example of Our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane. There Jesus prayed that the Cup—the Cross—might be removed. He prayed earnestly. According to Luke's account, he prayed so earnestly that he sweat blood. Even if that description is poetic license, it means that Jesus prayed a good deal harder than most of us ever do. And the answer to that prayer was emphatically "No! You have got to go through with it," but Jesus was also very definitely answered. To use again Luke's picturesque language, "And there appeared unto him an angel from heaven, strengthening him." [3] Jesus' serenity throughout his trials can only be understood in terms of a very real sense of answer to his Gethsemane prayer. Before real prayer can mean much to us we must achieve a point of view which recognizes that not getting what we ask for is every bit as much an answer to prayer as getting it.

A series of "Noes" to our prayers should lead us to reexamine our prayer life. This leads to a consideration of the nature and function of prayer. Too often people look upon prayer as a kind of subtle form of super magic. They try to use it as a device to make God do, or get, something for them that they do not think they can do or get by themselves. This is essentially a pagan and not Christian conception of prayer; it places the individual person at the center and assumes that the function of prayer is to satisfy the individual's desires—or at least what he considers his legitimate desires. Even worse, it frequently degenerates into a kind of bargaining process. "I will say so many prayers, or light so many candles, or give so much money, or do

[3] Luke 22:43.

such and such, if you, God, will do this for me." If God is a God who must be bargained with before He will meet us in prayer and grant us the strength that comes from His Holy Spirit, then the whole conception of the Incarnation and Redemption is false, and Jesus was not Christ but only a deluded imbecile! For the Christian, prayer is not a device for getting God to do things for us; prayer is a device whereby we discover what God wants us to do for Him in order that we may be worthy and obedient children. If we get a series of "Noes" to our prayers it is God telling us as plainly as He can that we are coming to Him on the wrong basis. There is nothing more important for understanding the function of prayer than this.

The other group who have difficulty with prayer are those who, for one reason or another, do not believe that God is the kind of a God who answers prayers in any personal sense. These people sincerely believe that their problem is intellectual. They believe in some kind of a God; they may even believe that He is a moral God who demands, in some vague way, that they live ethically, but they cannot believe in Him as a personal God concerned with them personally. Many of these people are in our churches. The only answer that can be made to the members of this group is "You have put the cart before the horse." If all a person seeks is an intellectual understanding of God, that is all he will get and for practical purposes in the matter of prayer, especially significant prayer, it will be rather unsatisfactory. One does not arrive at the reality of God, nor the validity of prayer by argument and discussion; one discovers both the reality of God and the validity of prayer by praying. The place to begin to make God real and prayer work is to pray,

and there is no other way. Of certain methods and techniques of prayer which will help I shall speak in a moment, but first there is one other obstacle to prayer which applies to both groups and which must be considered.

One of the greatest, although largely unrecognized obstacles, not only to making prayer real but also to the whole religious life is that we really do not want God. We may say that we want God and we may think that we do, but really we do not. To put it another way, we want God but not too much—not to the point of interference with our personal plans and ambitions. It is all very nice and comforting to have a God around somewhere on whom we can call when the going gets rough, but we do not want a God who, we suspect (frequently quite correctly) will interfere with our plans, say "No" to our ambitions, and direct us into paths we do not like. As a matter of fact we fear God and except in extreme emergencies when there seems to be no other solution we dread His interference. Soren Kierkegaard has analyzed this attitude in his book *The Concept of Dread* in a way that is very illuminating for thinking Christianly about prayer. Kierkegaard speaks of our "sympathetic antipathy and antipathetic sympathy." [4] The best way I can think of to make this very pregnant idea real to the reader is to ask him to recall times when he has stood on a railroad station platform and watched a train come roaring into the station. At one time or another under such circumstances we all have a strange desire to throw ourselves at the engine and at the same time a fear that pulls us back. We are both attracted and yet afraid at the same time. I think that this is something of what Kierkegaard means by "sym-

[4] Translated by Walter Lowrie, Princeton University Press, p. 38.

pathetic antipathy and antipathetic sympathy." It applies in many areas of life; we both want and are afraid of or dread the same thing at the same time.

This idea illumines the whole relationship between man and God, and consequently illumines the whole question of prayer. We say that we do not pray because our prayers are unanswered, or because we cannot intellectually believe in that kind of a God. What we really mean is that in spite of all our religiosity we do not trust God and are afraid to meet Him on His terms.

I do not suppose I have enough examples to establish a generalization that is infallible. I should not want to be too dogmatic about the point I now suggest. But I think it has some significance. Very occasionally I have been able to have a really leisurely honest discussion with a self-styled atheist or agnostic, the kind of discussion where one gets beyond superficialities and argument for argument's sake. On each of these occasions I was finally able to make the "atheist" admit that the real reason he (or she) called himself an atheist was not because of lack of belief in God or Christianity but because he really did believe in God and was afraid. There were certain patterns, goals, ambitions which he knew he would have to change if he accepted God. To have admitted a faith in God and not change his ways would have produced all the agony of a split personality. That would be too much of a price to pay; the only way he could maintain his own self-centeredness and have any peace of mind was to deny the existence of God. Then he did not have to change. Needless to say, no one should say such a man is a conscious hypocrite; he thinks he is honest and sincere in his atheism or agnosticism. It was not until there

had been a *lot* of talking that those with whom I talked became aware of their own process of reasoning, or perhaps better, of rationalizing.

The point is that these people really believe in God but they dread Him. Therefore they pretend, even to themselves, that they do not believe in Him. The major difference between them and us is that they are consciously aware of the "antipathy" but not consciously aware of the "sympathy." We, on the other hand, are conscious of the "sympathy" but are not usually conscious of the "antipathy." We say we want God; we may even think we want Him, but way down underneath we want Him only on our terms and are afraid to trust Him on His terms, for we know that His terms, in greater or less degree, are going to be different, perhaps upsettingly different, from our terms. Really to submit to God in the way real Christian prayer demands requires a more radical change in us than most of us are willing to make. Thus we "go limping between two sides," [5] wishing we could really pray but never being willing really to try it. There is no use in trying to fool either ourselves or others. All of us live such self-centered lives that any real prayer will compel drastic changes; yet as we try to meet the demands of real prayer the changes are never as terrible in fact as they appear in anticipation. God's demands are rigorous, but they are also fulfilling. The testimony of all those who have gone up this path is that God is trustworthy and that when we really do submit to Him we do receive the pearl of great price.[6] This is true, and most of us in our heart of hearts know that it is true, but the pearl is always a spiritual

[5] I Kings 18:21.
[6] Matthew 13:46.

pearl whose value can be appreciated only on a supra-temporal basis. And we live in this world which is too much with us. We dread to pay the price.

It is at this point that the problem of prayer and the problem of faith meet. There can be neither one without the other in any real sense. Both of them require a submission, a willingness to admit that we do not know what is best for us, and a capacity to trust God on an eternal basis. As should now be apparent, both are far more difficult than most of our talking would indicate. None of us ever achieves perfection in this matter; we are too self-centered, too much of-the-earth-earthy ever to let ourselves go completely as long as we have a chance to hold on to anything. However, we are not likely to grow at all unless we fully recognize the obstacles. Moreover, God made us this way. He understands our weaknesses and needs better than we do ourselves. If we will only make a beginning of turning and submitting to Him, He will meet us more than halfway.

Prayer and Circumstance

Without wishing to deny the importance or the necessity for regular specific times of prayer (as will appear later) it should be obvious from what has already been said that the writer believes that Christian prayer involves a total attitude toward life as much as it does specific prayers. The function of the specific prayers is to give meaning and direction to all the business of living. There has arisen among us a false division which separates life into religious activities and non-religious activities. Unfortunately this attitude frequently has been encouraged by the churches, probably be-

cause, in desperation, they are afraid of asking for all of life and want to hang on to something—like one hour a week. To refer to certain specific acts as religious and to let the rest go is of course simpler; it requires far less soul-searching and commitment. Perhaps it is better than nothing, but it is not Christian. Christianly speaking, God is the God of all of life, and prayer does not become true prayer until it merges into a continual total attitude towards all that we do and all that happens to us.

In the previous chapter, I spoke of faith as being "willing to wait for God to reveal His will for us through prayer, worship and circumstance . . . through circumstance is especially important." [7] I spoke also of "the quasi-fatalistic" character of Christianity. As with faith, so with prayer, it must be understood as a total attitude toward life, and seemingly trivial events may have a very great significance. It is important to understand that many of the answers we get to our prayers appear in circumstance, in things that happen to us. All the time innumerable things are happening to us, all of which to a greater or less degree affect our lives. People we meet, opportunities that open up, plans that are frustrated by forces beyond our control, so-called accidents, some of them important, some of them seemingly trivial, are happening to us and shaping our lives continually. In the last analysis, there are only two mutually exclusive attitudes that we can take toward these happenings; either they are pure accidents or else, even though we cannot always understand them, everything that happens is part of God's plan. If the first alternative is true, it means that God is not in control of His world and therefore is not God in

[7] P. 42.

any Christian sense. In fact, it means that there is no sense to life whatsoever. Life is just a horrible mistake. Christianity insists that the second alternative is the correct one. Its claim ultimately rests on the Incarnation and Resurrection. God is in control and logically this means that He is in control of everything. This seems to be the meaning of Jesus' teaching: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's will." [8]

The logic of this position is "an offense" to many and is exceedingly hard to understand and difficult to accept.[9] Does it mean that every trivial event that happens does so only because God wills it? Such an interpretation *seems* too picayune to take seriously. Frankly I do not know and would not want to be dogmatic. This is one of the places where we confront a mystery that goes beyond human understanding, and perhaps it is one of the places where we should apply Reinhold Niebuhr's dictum: "The most reasonable thing that a man can do is not to be perfectly reasonable." Nevertheless when one examines the problem seriously, there is more to be said for God's minute control than many of us have wanted to admit. (It humbles our pride too much.) Certainly many things or events which are later recognized as being of the utmost importance in the life of an individual or even a nation, had beginning in events and occurrences seemingly trivial and unimportant. The whole modern American foreign missionary movement was born when some Williams College students were caught in a thunderstorm and took refuge in a haystack over one hundred years

[8] Matthew 10:29.

[9] It also raises difficulties for the problem of evil which will be considered in Chapter 6.

ago. Why did that combination of circumstances arise? Certainly when the farmer decided to put that haystack in that particular place he was not aware that a thunderstorm and some particular college students would "meet" there and give birth to the greatest Christian movement in the last 1500 years! Again, those of us who are Christians and who are married feel inexplainably but quite rightly that we are married not to just anyone (although we may know that there are other people we might have married); we are married to the "right person for us." Yet when we try to figure out how we came to meet and fall in love with that particular person we soon get lost in a maze of acts and decisions both of our own and of other people, many of whom we have never known. Most of the acts and decisions at the time seemed so trivial that they are forgotten, but each one had a very real role to play.

Toward the end of Donn Byrne's delightful *Messer Marco Polo,* Marco is in consultation with the Grand Khan about whether he should return to Venice or not. Finally the Grand Khan speaks of "the destiny that rules all things, now with a nudge, now with the leading of a finger, now with a terrible blow over the heart, and what we think at twenty-five was a trifling incident, at seventy-five we know to be part of the enormous gesture of God." [10] This is a true religious insight and it is a further religious insight that Donn Byrne includes "the terrible blow over the heart" as well as the nudge and the leading of a finger as part of God's mercy.

Whether every trivial incident is planned by God I do not know. It seems rather picayune for God to have to

[10] *Messer Marco Polo* by Donn Byrne, Century Co., 1921, p. 140.

decide whether I scratch a mosquito bite from right to left or from left to right. This much, however, seems to be a minimal Christian statement: *Every event, no matter how apparently trivial, which has any consequential results is within the province of God.* To this should be added a corollary substantiated by psychology: *All the major decisions of life and the consequential results have apparently trivial antecedents.* If God is not in control and shaping those trivial events which in turn shape the "major events" He is not in control at all. The alternative is no God and a meaningless world.

This sets the stage for understanding prayer as an attitude toward all of life. In our actual periods of prayer we should use the time to try to see what is happening to us and to understand circumstance as guidance from God. If our hopes are frustrated we should recognize this as no less of a message from God than if our hopes were fulfilled. Prayer, as I have said, is not asking God to do things for us but asking God what He wants us to do. Some rare souls seem to get direct guidance while in the act of prayer. Only very rarely have I had anything remotely approximating such an experience. I look upon them with some suspicion. They may have been *bona fide* revelations, but also the wish may have been "father to the thought." Most of the major decisions of my life have been made not while actually in the act of formal prayer but by seeing circumstances pile up in such a way that the decision of what to do became obvious. I remember one time when I had a very important decision to make regarding my future work. I determined that I should pray until I received an answer. I went out on a hillside and prayed and meditated and did all the things I had

read or heard about which ought to be done, but after an hour and a half I was just as confused as when I started. Some weeks later, after a number of things had happened, what I ought to do became quite clear, although I do not know how or when it actually did. As I look back on it now, the decision was the right one.

Christian prayer, then, is developing a total attitude toward life which sees life and all that happens in it as coming from God and consequently full of creative possibilities—even in the midst of apparent defeat. There is, then, only one legitimate prayer the Christian can pray. It is the prayer of Our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Not my will, but Thine, be done." [11] In practical terms this means that in our times of prayer the only thing we can ask for ourselves is that we may understand God's will enough to do it, that we may be given grace to be able to interpret what is happening about us as God's direction, and that we may become fit instruments for His work. Needless to say, such a conception of prayer presupposes all that has been said both about the reality of eternity and the trustworthiness of God.

Techniques of Private Prayer

Any such attitude toward life as has just been described presupposes of necessity an active regular prayer life. We are too frail and too much preoccupied with the mundane to be able to do it without the constant reinforcement that comes from specific times of prayer and worship. I am not dicussing the formal aspect of worship except to say that

[11] Luke 22:42.

Christianity is a communal religion and that the Church is the Fellowship of believers; therefore, if the Church is a God-ordained society, no Christian can or will wilfully absent himself from the formal worship of the Church. People who think that they can go to church or not as they choose and still be Christian are really setting themselves up as the final authorities of what is necessary for their salvation. This, of course, is one of the more subtle forms of blasphemy. My concern here, however, is more with private prayer than with public worship.

The technique of private prayer is a special discipline. There are tested methods of prayer that have long been established. In nothing that I have to say here is there anything particularly new or anything that anyone with a little judicious reading and experimental practice could not find out. The road to effective prayer, while no four-lane super-highway, is a well trodden path clearly marked by those who have gone before. Neither shall I attempt to be exhaustive; I shall simply record certain methods which I have found to work. At times I shall have to write quite personally because in this matter I can only speak authoritatively of my own experience. But I am sure that there is nothing unusual about it. Anyone can duplicate it in his own way; many have, and many have gone much further.

As every Christian knows, we can and indeed must pray little brief prayers anywhere any time—while washing dishes, on a busy street, when meeting a person, etc. He who is trying really to develop a life of prayer that works will find that he uses all kinds of "odd" occasions. However, unless there is behind these "little prayers" a regular discipline in praying, the little prayers are likely to be selfish

and self-centered pagan prayers rather than Christian prayers. The first statement that needs to be made, then, is that there is no possibility of a prayer life that means much unless we discipline ourselves in regular unhurried times of prayer. This is hard discipline, and let there be no mistake about it. Most of us live very full and hectic lives. One literally has to fight to make time for prayer. But just as we cannot get much from music or literature, or art, or even bridge, without taking time, neither can we expect to get much from prayer without working at it.

In our modern life, considerable ingenuity has to be used. One of the most successful periods of prayer life that I ever had was when I had a job that required commuting to an office every day. (Perhaps I am too mundane, but I am not a person who can think very clearly before breakfast, especially before having coffee. All attempts I have made to get up an hour early for prayer and meditation such as the mystics advocate have proven unsuccessful.) Like most households with small children and without servants, mine was pretty hectic in the morning and at night I was exhausted. I found, however, that each morning I had about forty minutes on a trolley and that although there were people about me, I could be utterly alone if I chose to be. Never have I practiced prayer more regularly or more successfully than at that time.

We must fight and plan for time, but it is possible to find the time if we want to. Most of us even on our busiest days waste an unconscionable amount of time. It is best to have the times regular as far as possible, but even if we are interrupted or have an unavoidable appointment at our regular time, it is still possible to find another few minutes

later in the day. Any time is better than none at all. To reverse the old adage: "Anything worth doing is worth doing badly, provided it is no worse than it has to be."

The second suggestion for effective prayer is to be reasonably comfortable. The traditional physical posture for prayer is on the knees. It is a physical act of submission and certainly we have no right to seek the presence or grace of God in any mood except one of submission. If one can pray best on his knees, then that is the way he should pray. Perhaps it is a confession of my own spiritual shallowness, but I must admit that if I pray very long on my knees I find myself thinking about my knees and not really praying. The physical attitude which is best is the one which is most natural for the individual and the one in which he can most completely forget his body and the world and can concentrate on the business of praying.

The legend of the Juggler of Notre Dame is illuminating. According to this legend a juggler wanted to pay his respects to the Virgin and receive her blessing. But all that he could do was to juggle, and he did not think that the church authorities would allow that in the cathedral. After pondering the matter for some time, the juggler hit upon a plan. He waited until late at night; then he took his paraphernalia and quietly slipped into the empty cathedral. He placed his mat before the statue of the Virgin, lay on his back and put on his best juggling act. After his act was under way, a priest happened to enter the back of the cathedral on some errand. He saw strange objects flying up and down in the air. He investigated and to his horror saw the juggler on his back juggling before the Virgin. The priest was about to rush over and throw the ruffian out when he saw the Virgin

step down from her pedestal and, taking the hem of her dress, wipe the perspiration from the juggler's brow. The point is obvious. When we come before Almighty God, the physical position we are in has little importance if we bring the best we have and are in a spirit of humility and submission. The blessing will be ours.

The third suggestion rests largely on what was said in the previous section, that the only legitimate Christian prayer is: "Lord, not my will but Thine be done." In practical terms this means that we do not pray for things, for health, for wealth or for happiness. We do not even pray for God to bless various enterprises or people about whom we are concerned unless we put more content into the expression "God bless" than is usually put into it. Rather we pray that we may know the will of God for us in regard to various people or enterprises. Thus we do not pray: "God bless Johnny" or "God bless the Church"; we pray: "God, what do you want me to do about Johnny, or the Church?" After we have prayed about (rather than for) the various concerns and people, we consider our own personal concerns and problems, but again in an attitude, not of what do I want to do, but of what does God want done?

It is an excellent idea to keep a card with lists. It serves as a marker in one's Bible and guide and reminder in praying. Any kind of a card will do. If it gets lost or used up, just make a new one. My own practice is to have three columns on the card. In the first column are the names of people about whom I am concerned or feel special responsibility. At the top are the names of "permanent concerns"; they are written in ink. Lower down are listed "temporary people," those for whom for a special and temporary reason

I am concerned. These are written in pencil so that when the occasion goes by their names can be erased and others put in. The second column lists organizations, projects, etc. and is likewise divided between the "permanent" and the "temporary." For instance, the Church and the institution for which I work are, among others, permanent, but special events are temporary. In the third column are listed my own personal problems. Sometimes at the top and at the bottom is written a verse from the Bible.

There is a good deal of devotional literature on the market, some of it good, and some mediocre. I do not recall any I thought bad, for any help is better than none. For myself, except for supplemental reading, I have not used much of it. I prefer the Bible, and I have found in recent years that I prefer the New Testament Letters and the Book of Acts. The Gospels state the ideal, but the Letters of Paul and of other New Testament writers reveal the struggle of ordinary people to apply the Gospel to life. I find that they, to use a Quaker expression, "speak to my condition" better than anything else.

Sometimes in prayer of the sort I have been outlining, one gets a sense of direction. My experience is that this is more likely to be true regarding people or a project one is praying about. It may be something very simple, like writing a letter, going to see someone, accepting or rejecting a social, civic, or church responsibility. Whatever direction comes should be followed, no matter how unpleasant. Sometimes, and this occurs more often in the case of important decisions, the problem does not become simplified but actually more complex. This is no cause for discouragement; it may well be a sign of God's grace. Perhaps we are trying to seek a

more simple solution than the facts warranted, and if to see it in its true complexity is to see it more accurately, we have advanced. Sometimes, and this can happen discouragingly often, nothing seems to happen at all. We feel as though the time has been wasted. At such times we must hang on and force ourselves if need be. If we persevere, the time will always come when we can look back upon those "dry spells" and realize that God was with us even though we did not realize it. In time we are compelled to confess with Jacob of old: "Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not." [12]

When the actual period of prayer is over, we go forth. The effectiveness and the value of our prayers are not judged in terms of what happens while actually praying. The prayer periods are to be used as guideposts and as a scaffolding for life. We go forth to our humdrum work-a-day lives doing what comes to hand as best we can. If we have received something which we feel is guidance we follow it, but if, as is more often the case, we have received nothing special, we carry on our work without worry and with a sense of expectancy. We keep an eye out, so to speak, for seemingly casual circumstances that may be God speaking to us.

One last suggestion. As I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, one of the greatest obstacles to prayer is our feeling of self-sufficiency. In our highly protected button-pushing civilization we frequently feel that we can get along without God, and that we are self-sufficient. Prayer can become real only when we get over this feeling. Therefore it is a very good technique to put ourselves deliberately in places where we know we are beyond our capacities, to

[12] Genesis 28:16.

accept responsibilities for jobs, causes, people that make us feel inadequate, to run the risk of failure. Needless to say, anyone who tries to pray along the lines here suggested will find himself rather constantly in such situations. However, because we are naturally so timid, we need practice in this regard, particularly at the beginning. How can we expect to learn to trust God unless we put ourselves in situations where we have to trust Him?

And what is the result of this kind of life? I can think of no better description than that of Thomas Kelly. "Here is not ecstasy but serenity, unshakeableness, firmness of life-orientation. We become what [George] Fox calls 'established men'." [13] To this I should add only that in time we also discover that somehow through us God has spoken and acted even though we did not know it at the time.

[13] *Testament of Devotion* by Thomas Kelly, Harper, p. 42, 1943.

5

*Thinking Christianly About Death**

AT THE VERY BEGINNING, IT SHOULD BE MADE CLEAR that this is not a chapter on Immortality or life after death. There will be no attempt to prove the continuance of life after death. The whole traditional Christian faith about immortality or eternal life is assumed and taken for granted. That faith does, however, provide a background for all that will be said here. It should be obvious to the reader by this time that the whole position taken in this book necessitates such an assumption; without it, the entire argument is futile. I wish to approach the subject from a quite different point of view.[1]

Although I have insisted as vigorously as I know how throughout this book on the necessity for thinking in terms of eternity and eternal life as prerequisites for any thinking Christianly, this does not deny the fact that we are now in

* The substance of this chapter appeared originally in *The Intercollegian* under the title "Death Steals the Show."

[1] Although I think my treatment is largely my own, observant readers will recognize my indebtedness to Douglas V. Steere's chapter "Death's Illumination of Life" in his *On Beginning from Within* (Harper). I am happy to acknowledge this indebtedness.

the process of living our lives in this temporal world. Eternity is probably important in itself without any reference to this life, but in so far as we are in this life, eternity is, for the moment, important only insofar as it illuminates the business of living now. Our problem as human beings is to live now as effectively as we can. Christianity insists that we can approach our greatest effectiveness in this life only by recognizing and being guided by the Eternal, but the emphasis is on living here while we are here. It is at this point that death is far more significant and has far more importance than most people realize.

As soon as one begins to think about death two things stand out. We all know that we are going to die sometime (as my mother used to put it, "Very few of us get out of this world alive!"); and it is about the last thing in the world we want to think about.[2] This is one of the strange phenomena of life. Only in the most abstract philosophical sense, such as considering the pros and cons of a belief in some kind of immortality are we willing to think about the question at all. Even such a diluted discussion is not considered good taste at the dinner table or a social gathering. Nevertheless we all must die and we know it. Death is the

[2] During the War I gave the substance of this chapter as a sermon in a fashionable and "enlightened" eastern college. Young men were going off to face death and young women were falling in love with men some of whom would not come back. It seemed appropriate for a Christian minister to try to say something Christian to that situation. Although I had been preaching regularly at that college for several years I never was asked back. A friend on the faculty told me later that the sermon created a near riot. There were letters to the college paper and petitions and delegations to the President. The substance of all this furor was: "If we have to have compulsory chapel, we do not want to have to listen to sermons about death!"

great skeleton in all our closets and we do everything possible to keep the skeleton locked up; we even try to plaster the door so that we can forget there is a closet. Think of the millions of dollars spent every year on morticians (we no longer call them funeral directors) whose job it is to make the dead look as much like the living as possible, so that when we do have to go to a funeral the shock will be as slight as possible and we shall not be made to think of how complete the dissolution of the body is. Seldom will doctors tell a patient that he is going to die. If perchance we are called upon to visit a very sick person, the last thing in the world we are expected to say is, "My friend, it looks as though you were about to die. Is there anything I can do to help you?" The shock of such a statement would probably kill the patient and perhaps the nurses! But what could be more appropriate for one Christian friend to say to another? The Roman Catholics do better than we Protestants at this point with their extreme unction. In my opinion extreme unction can do absolutely nothing for the ultimate destiny of the soul.[3] In spite of this, however, extreme unction does make the patient and those about him face realistically the fact of death, not in the abstract but in the concrete.[4] This virtue alone may make it worth doing. The simple fact is that we are all dying people. It is not just the people critically ill or in starvation areas who are dying; every one of us is a dying person right now. It would seem more intelligent to face that fact and see what death has to say for life.

[3] It is incredible to me that God's treatment of a soul would be altered by whether or not it had received a particular form of ritual.

[4] I presume also that insofar as one really believed in this ceremony it would give some peace of mind.

The Significance of Death

The reason why we do not wish to face the fact of death realistically is that in spite of anything we may say, do, or pretend, we are afraid of death. It seems so completely the end of all that most of us know. For many people to think or talk about death is to remind them of this end and that takes the joy out of life. It reminds them of how transitory are all human pleasures, which are frequently the only pleasures they know. It makes them depressed and they think it morbid. But properly understood, to think seriously about death is not morbid. It is only our twisted thinking that makes it seem so. Actually when we pull the cover off death and take the skeleton out of the closet and face it realistically, it does not make life morbid; it gives life a new richness. To look death in the eye, so to speak, and to begin to understand that every moment of life is only a kind of brief "leave of absence" from death does not make living more terrible or less significant. Rather it makes every moment of life that much more significant.

I do not usually go to the movies to gain insights into life; I go, when I go, for entertainment. Once in a long, long time, however, I get a surprise. One of those occasions was when I saw the wartime movie, *Mrs. Miniver*. There was a scene toward the end of the picture where Carol, who had recently married Vince, Mrs. Miniver's son, was talking with her mother-in-law. Vince was now a flier in the R.A.F. in the Battle of Britain. Fortunately Vince was stationed near enough his home so that he could get home often, but he was constantly being called for action. In this particular scene, Mrs. Miniver and Carol were alone, and they were

facing realistically the fact that every time Vince left it might be the last, and they were facing not only the possibility but the probability that he would be killed in battle. Finally Carol said something like this, "I know! I know!—Tonight! Tomorrow! Any day!—but that makes every minute so much more precious!" That is it! When we live life under the consciousness of death it does not make life more dull or morbid, it gives every moment, every word, every act a new preciousness. The apparently trivial acts, the humdrum everyday acts that we think insignificant, receive a reference to the ultimate and eternal which lifts them out of the mundane and trivial and gives them ultimate meaning. To realize the transitoriness of life is to realize its preciousness. To face death frankly and to be aware that all that I do is done under the judgment of death does not make my life poorer or sadder; it makes it infinitely better and richer. That is the first statement to be made about death.

The second thing is that death is an individual experience. Dimly we are subconsciously aware of this fact. But until we face our own death it does not mean much to us. Moreover in these last few years when so many have died and when our journals have flooded us with the most revolting pictures of the dead, we have become inured to death. We have read so often that so many thousands were killed or died that it rolls off us like water off a duck's back. We may say: "That is awful!" but it does not mean much. Yet when we stop to think about it each one of those thousands or millions died an individual death. When a man dies, even if he dies at the same time and the same place as another person, his death is an individual death. No one else can die his death for him. If he is fortunate, friends and loved ones

can stand by and offer sympathy, the Church can offer solace, but when all is said and done he has to die all by himself—alone.

There is a lot of talk today about individualism. We talk about the rights of the individual; educators talk about developing the individual; we encourage people to express their individuality. We have already fought a series of wars presumably to protect the rights of the individual. Much of this emphasis is good and probably necessary; each person is an individual and should be recognized and treated as such. Nevertheless I wonder whether most people really want to be individuals or understand what it means. It seems to me that most people do not understand what it means to be an individual and what little they understand they do not like. To be an individual means to be alone—to stand alone—and most people, whatever they may say, do not want to be alone. They run from aloneness like the plague and try to submerge themselves in the crowd.

I ask the reader to recall a common experience which all of us have had, namely, entering into a strange room in which there are a group of people whom we do not know. The illustration will be more vivid if the people represent in our minds a social or economic station "above" that to which we are accustomed. Outwardly we may appear calm but inwardly we are self-conscious and perhaps have a funny feeling in the pit of our stomachs. The whole situation is unpleasant. Afterwards when we can relax we are glad that the occasion is over. At the moment when we entered the strange room, full of strange people, we had an experience of individuality. We were alone and knew that we were alone, and we did not like it.

This is the psychological basis of much of our fear of death. Death individualizes us. At death each person, all by himself, comes alone before the ultimate and eternal.

If death means facing inescapably our individuality, it means by the same token for most people a major crisis. The reason why it is a major crisis, in fact, *the* major crisis in life, is that up until the time of death most of us manage to escape facing ourselves as individuals. We invent all kinds of devices for escaping our individuality; in fact, in spite of all of our talk about individualism we have organized society so as to make individualization as difficult as possible. Now, at death, for the first time and of inescapable necessity, we have to face the ultimate as an individual who has nothing but his individuality—and the experience can be terrifying.

In all other crises of life we can manage with some sort of compromise. We can "make a deal," kid ourselves, join a group, blame other people or circumstances. But with death there can be no compromise. In this sense, death is like going through the needle's eye. In every other one of life's situations a man can escape with his life, and usually with most of his possessions. But in death we are stripped of everything—not just to the bone but to the soul. A man's possessions and reputation become meaningless. Even those who love him can do nothing. In spite of all that the mortician's art can do to make his going easier for his friends, it can do nothing for him. He must leave his body, his possessions, and his reputation behind.

In that moment of life, the last moment when he faces the ultimate of death alone, he also faces the ultimate question of life: *"In what have you put your trust?"* This *is*

the ultimate question of life. Most of us manage to avoid it or dodge it all our life long. We manufacture all kinds of devices for getting around it. But at last it always catches up with us. We have to answer it. *"In what have you put your trust?"* What are the values to which you have given your life? What are the motives that have really determined your choices? It is a very practical concrete question which can be answered only in terms of what we have lived for. *We are answering that question now while we are living.*

Death is not only an individualizing event. It is also the major and inescapable crisis of life, when at last we face the ultimate all alone and answer the question: "In what have you put your trust?"

Death as Giving Up

Biologically, I presume that death might be defined as the cessation of all bodily functions. As far as we are individual people, however, that definition is hardly enough. It may be enough to describe death scientifically, but it is not enough to describe what death means to me. On this more personal basis, death might be defined as a "giving up of ourselves." Whether we like it or whether we do not, we quite literally give up at death. The old frontier expression for death, "to cash in," is not inappropriate. When we die we give up completely and irrevocably.

This inevitable fact of giving up is also what makes death terrible for many people. We fear death partly because we have to face it alone and partly because we have to give up all that we know and love, all that is dear and familiar. And

we do not like to do it! It is at this point that we reach bottom concerning the meaning of death, and, paradoxically, it is at this point that we see how facing and understanding death may illuminate life.

If death is the final and absolute giving up of ourselves which all of us know we must do some day, then the way to prepare for death and to rob it of its terrors is to recognize death's meaning for life and to recognize that death stands supremely for what the nature of life is like. If death is giving up, then life must be giving up too. In life we can prepare for death by the daily practice of partially giving up ourselves, or as Douglas Steere so pregnantly puts it, "the practice of dying little deaths." [5] It is here that the words of Our Lord: "For whosoever would save his life will lose it" [6] become meaningful.

This aphorism is of course the supreme paradox of life. The simple fact is that we find ourselves and become creative exactly in proportion to the degree in which we are able to lose ourselves or give ourselves up to something other than ourselves. If, when we go into that room of strangers which makes us feel self-conscious and alone, we suddenly find a group of friends to whom we can give ourselves in friendship, our self-consciousness and sense of aloneness disappear. We become more at ease and more creative. So in every area of life, in proportion to our ability to lose ourselves, to give up ourselves, to die little deaths, we gain freedom and find life.

A word of warning needs to be given here. It is impossible for any man to live without giving himself to something even

[5] *Op. cit.* pp. 132 ff.
[6] Matthew 16:25, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24.

if it is only to his own selfish desires and ambitions. And everything that we give ourselves to puts its stamp upon us. It becomes an irrevocable part of the accumulated answer to the question: "In what have you put your trust?" By now I hope it is evident that I am not much of a moralist and shall speak more about morality later. However, one does not need to be a long-faced moralist to recognize that it is tremendously important *to what* we give ourselves, for what values we are willing to die our little deaths. Here, if anywhere, "whatever a man sows that he will also reap." [7] If we give ourselves to sexual indulgence, we find not life but boredom. If we give ourselves to self-indulgence, we find not life but an increasing inability to face life. If we give ourselves to avariciousness or pride, we find not life but increasing fear of what can happen to our wealth or prestige. If we give ourselves up to any of the various forms of selfishness, we find not life but increasing aloneness and fear. Consequently Our Lord did not say merely, "For whosoever would save his life will lose it"; he went on to say, "and whoever loses his life *for my sake and the gospel's* will save it"! That makes all the difference in the world. According to the Christian faith, the only value worth losing our life for (and we cannot escape losing it sometime) is the God revealed by Our Lord Jesus Christ. When we do this we find life.

> O Love that will not let me go,
> I rest my weary soul in Thee:
> I give Thee back the life I owe,
> That in Thine ocean depths its flow
> May richer, fuller be.[8]

[7] Galatians 6:7.
[8] From the hymn by George Matheson.

Death is inescapably giving up, but life is just as inescapably giving up too! Thus death and life are not two separate things; they are both parts of one piece. Perhaps we now can see how death illuminates life and also can see the importance of "dying little deaths" daily.

"As Dying Behold We Live" [9]

God in His great mercy and wisdom has so arranged our lives on this earth that daily we have an infinite number of opportunities for this kind of living. Because we are selfish and human, none of us will ever make the most of all our opportunities or reach perfection. But here is the direction in which we can move and grow. In practical terms this means that every day there are causes, there are friends and there are strangers, there are needs which call upon us to give up something of ourselves. To a large degree our growth will depend upon an increased sensitivity to circumstance and what is happening to us and around us. Of this I have already spoken. Sometimes the various demands upon us which require us to give up something of ourselves will be obviously important. More frequently they will be apparently trivial humdrum affairs. But we must never forget that Jesus did not minimize the importance of a cup of water given to a child.[10] Few of us will have opportunity to decide what should be the method for controlling the atomic bomb, but all of us meet people, and most of us have jobs we can do well or badly. We may not be able to do reconstruction work in Europe or personally spread the

[9] II Cor. 6:9.
[10] Matthew 10:42.

Gospel in Asia or Africa, but we can all give of our substance more than we do.[11] In every community there are people and needs which demand that we give up something of ourselves. We have no excuse if we come to our death frightened or cynical or alone; God has given us infinite opportunity for the practice of "dying little deaths."

All of us die; all of us are dying people right now; all of us are only on a leave of absence which will terminate soon or late. This is a fact of life that cannot be permanently shut up in a closet. There is nothing terrible about it; it is only our distorted mundane attitude that makes it seem terrible. Actually to face death makes life more meaningful. It reminds us of the preciousness of each moment of life, and thereby gives more meaning and significance to every act and aspect of life. Death also is God's great schoolmaster which shows us how we must live now, how we must practice the art of daily "dying little deaths."

In the early part of World War II, the *Reader's Digest* published an anonymous letter from an American soldier written to his parents shortly before the fall of Bataan. It said, in part:

> I would not, even if it were possible leave here until it is over. . . . At last I have found that for which I have searched all my life—a cause and a job in which I can lose myself completely. . . . I have mentally and spiritually conquered my fear of death. My prayer each night and morning is that God will send you who are suffering so much more than I His strength and peace.[12]

[11] We talk glibly about "giving till it hurts." For the most part it is a hypocritical statement. Almost nobody ever does—or ever intends to!

[12] Reader's Digest, Sept. 1942, quoted from *Washington Daily News.*

Viewed from the eternal scheme of things, it does not matter whether that boy is alive or dead today. Of course, it matters to those who love him and miss him if he is dead, but as far as he himself is concerned it does not matter. Life—with a capital L—is not measured in length of days or years; it is measured by its quality, by its color, by its intensity, by the recognition of the preciousness of each moment. The grandeur of a full and creative life can be lived in a few months or even days if we have learned to give ourselves up. That boy had learned to give himself up in God's trustworthiness. For the Christian that is all there is to life. That is the ultimate. Unfortunately there are men and women three times his age who have not yet discovered it. They have not found the meaning of death. They do not understand what Saint Paul meant when he wrote, "as dying behold we live."

6

Thinking Christianly About Evil and Suffering

SO FAR IN THIS BOOK I HAVE BEEN DODGING A QUESTION which I am sure must have arisen in the reader's mind, namely the question of evil and suffering. Particularly, I suspect, in the chapter on Faith, but all through what I have written, the observant reader must legitimately have asked: "But what about evil in the world? If God is the trustworthy God you make Him out to be, how can you explain all the suffering that goes on?"

The question is well raised. Of all the problems of faith none is more difficult. It is the perennial problem of philosophers and theologians, and it is with considerable timidity that I venture into this field at all. I do it partly because the logic of my position demands that I at least come to grips with the problem, for otherwise I would not be intellectually honest, and partly because I have the hope that my thinking will help sharpen the thought of some reader. First let me try to state the problem fully in all its enormity in order that no reader may feel that I am dodging the issue.

The Problem of Suffering

In a general kind of way anyone who has ever done any thinking at all is aware that there are some difficult problems concerning the suffering involved in life. For some of this suffering we can find explanations. Some of it obviously comes from natural phenomena and the necessary workings of nature. For instance, even though I fall downstairs and break my arm, the law of gravitation is still good. Some of the consequences may be unfortunate for particular people, but natural laws are necessities which make life possible and we have to accommodate ourselves to them. Some suffering can be accounted for in terms of human selfishness and pride, the lust for power and the lust for pleasure. Certainly much of the suffering of the world comes from man's inhumanity to man. Recognition of how much suffering is produced by people themselves may account for a great deal of suffering, perhaps most of it, but it does not fully explain *why* suffering should exist. It does not explain why man should be the kind of a being who does derive, in an almost diabolical degree, satisfaction from actions which make other people suffer.

The traditional answer for this problem, at least as old as the story of Adam and Eve, is that God gives man freedom of choice and man usually chooses the selfish rather than the unselfish. The assumptions back of this answer (they are the only assumptions possible) are that God wants people to have character and that character is a meaningless term unless there is freedom of choice. Character becomes meaningful only when there is a real opportunity to choose the evil or the selfish, and when this opportunity is voluntarily re-

jected in favor of the good and the unselfish. Only in such a situation is there possibility of character. God, so the argument runs, had to give us this freedom of choice in order that we might develop character—in other words, that we might be men rather than beasts. Unfortunately the development of character takes a long, long time. Some of us most of the time and all of us much of the time choose the bad and the selfish and thereby produce suffering.

This explanation, however, does not completely solve the problem; neither does it completely exonerate God. In the first place, it is the innocent people who usually suffer most for the selfishness of the selfish. Selfish people do pay a price for their selfishness, but at least as far as this world is concerned it is usually the innocent people who are the victims of other people's selfishness and pay the highest price. For instance, assuming that Hitler was half as black as he was painted, it would have been humanly impossible to devise any kind of torture that would remotely compensate for the amount of suffering and agony he created.

In one sense, of course, none of us is fully innocent and none of us lives the way he knows he ought to live; all of us deserve some condemnation. In this sense, it is quite legitimate to look upon the war and its accompanying tragedies as God's righteous judgment on a world that had become too selfish and hypocritical to be endured.[1] At the same time, the distribution of the suffering and agony defies all conceptions of reason or justice. Surely Americans over

[1] This is, incidentally, one of the strongest arguments for the existence of a righteous God. Had we as nations, peoples and individuals been able to "get away" with our hypocrisy and selfishness without a war it would mean that there is no unbreakable moral order and no God.

the last twenty-five years are no more innocent than Czechoslovakians or Norwegians; yet we have not suffered anywhere near so much. All things considered, there is no justification for saying that Mary Jones of Omaha is less guilty than Masumi Yushu of Hiroshima. I am glad that my children go to bed each night fed and in security, but I cannot believe that they are better than hundreds of thousands of other children who, if they go to bed at all, go starved with no hope for the morrow. There seems to be no understandable justice in the distribution of suffering. In fact, it appears that the "more innocent" pay far more than the "more guilty." "Vice is the most inexpensive of luxuries; one generally pays for it with the happiness of other people." [2] If God is both good and powerful, how can this be?

Further, consider the long accumulated history of suffering. We are aware, although not enough to do much about it, that there has been tremendous suffering in the last few years and much of it still persists. But we are too inclined to think that this is a temporary situation and not normal. We romanticize the past and forget that, taking history as a whole, our situation is not particularly abnormal and that today there is proportionally probably not much more suffering than in the past. We see the glamor of ancient civilization and forget that it was built upon slavery and exploitation. Who can measure in terms of human agony the cost of the pyramids? We forget the lot of the slave and the serf. We are horrified at Hitler's cremation camps, as well we should be, but it is doubtful that they were any more terrible

[2] *Lackeys of the Moon* by Mary Cass Canfield, The Brick Row Book Shop, Inc., 1923. By permission of the author and the publisher.

than the tortures of the ancients or of the Middle Ages. We read of famines and squalor in many parts of the world, in Europe and in Asia (and, if not exactly famine, at least squalor in many parts of the United States), but there have always been famine and squalor. There have always been wars. There has never been a year in history when millions of people have not lived in terror and insecurity and died in agony. There is no reason to be complacent about suffering just because it has always been here. I am not in any sense trying to advocate indifference to suffering or "throwing up the sponge" just because the problem is gigantic. All that I am trying to do is to face the facts realistically as they bear on the problem of suffering. The history of suffering is long and beyond human calculation. This is a terrible price to pay in order that a very few people may learn to choose the unselfish life rather than the selfish, particularly when most of us most of the time still choose the selfish. One can legitimately raise the question: Is not the price too great? How can God be good and let this amount of agony go on generation after generation just to produce a few choice souls?

One more aspect of the problem of evil or suffering needs to be considered. We have observed, to what might be called a diabolical degree, that the innocent suffer for the guilty as they have been suffering for the guilty throughout all history. In a sense, however, as we have so far considered the matter, this suffering is man-caused, and therefore man shares at least some of the blame. There is another group of sufferers, and it is hardly fair to say that their suffering is caused by the selfishness of men. Consider for instance an illustration that is repeated with variations tragically too

often these days. Last week in the community where I write a man with his wife and two of his children drove too quickly from a side road on to an arterial highway. A huge truck having no time to stop crashed into the car. The mother and one child were killed outright; the father and the other child died a few hours later. A third child at home was left an orphan. The man may have been guilty of carelessness, but it is impossible to see how on any basis of justice, particularly moral justice, that family should be blotted out and the remaining child made an orphan. My father-in-law was for some years the head of a hospital for crippled children. It was a terrific shock the first time one went into it. I never came away without wondering why these children should be so blighted and handicapped. The blame can hardly be placed upon man, except perhaps as a natural condition of life, but that is hardly man's creation or fault. If God is the Creator and the Ruler of the world He is responsible for the imbeciles and insane and for the "tragic accidents." There appear only two possible alternatives: either God is good and not powerful enough to do the good He intends, or else He is powerful but not really good—in fact He is a fiend.

In a discussion of Christianity the latter position seems not worth bothering with. That God is a fiend is too incredible. On the one hand, such a position makes man, the creature, better than God the Creator, and on the other hand it completely destroys all moral law and all conceptions of right. Modern people who are confronted with the problem of evil are more likely to conclude that either there is no God at all, or else He is some blind impersonal force. But this position is also impossible for the Christian, for Christianity

declares that there is a God, that He is good and that He is powerful.

Various attempts have been made to reconcile God's goodness and power with the facts of evil. One of the classic answers, already discussed, is that God has given man freedom of choice. While we have granted that there is some truth in this position we have also seen that it does not solve the problem. Another answer is that there is a principle of evil in the world warring against God. This force for evil is symbolized and personified in Satan or the Devil. When one looks at the amount of suffering and evil in the world it is not surprising that people have come to this conclusion. But it is still unsatisfactory, for it means either that God could not prevent evil and therefore is not powerful, or else that He permitted evil and therefore He is responsible for it. One very venerable theory is that God gave His angels freedom too, and that one of them, Satan, revolted against God; God, in order to be consistent with Himself, permitted this and further permits Satan to "wreak havoc" among men in order that they may be tested. However, in time, when God decides, He will destroy Satan and abolish evil. This position is more Zoroastrian than Christian. Moreover, it seems a terrific and an unfair price for man to pay for an event that took place before man was created. Surely the God of our Lord Jesus Christ is not a Deity who uses men and angels as pawns in a game of chess with Himself. Only a blind devotion that refuses to face the facts of life can deny that this position still leaves elements of fiendishness in God's nature. We are back where we started from; either God is good and not powerful, or He is powerful and not good.

Beyond Good and Evil

Is there any solution to this dilemma? I think that there is, and while I do not think the solution I offer is particularly novel, I suspect it will go against the gain with many people. The only solution to the problem that I see which maintains both God's goodness and His power (both of which must be maintained from the Christian point of view) is a solution that recognizes two facts: One is the fact of the Eternal. The other is the fact that God, to use Berdyaev's phrase, is "beyond good and evil." [3]

I have already discussed the fact of the Eternal in some detail. It is indeed the starting point and central thesis of this whole book. I shall not go into it again except to emphasize that, strictly in terms of this world, there is no solution to the problem of evil. Too many men and women through all the ages have lived and died in misery for there to be any solution on any basis but one that goes beyond this world. If the case for God's goodness rests entirely on what happens to His children in this world, it has already been irrevocably lost. And with it, of course, is lost all meaning for life except perhaps a desperate despair that nobly spits into the hurricane that blows it down! The understanding of the Eternal is absolutely essential to any solution of the problem of evil and suffering.

The fact that God is beyond good and evil is an even more difficult position for many Christians to grasp than the fact of eternity. However, what has already been said

[3] Although I do not agree with all of it, my thinking has been greatly stimulated by Nicholas Berdyaev's *Destiny of Man*. This same point of view was also expressed by Origen.

in Chapter 3 on Faith at least should have opened the subject of the possibility of this solution. As was suggested in that Chapter 3,[4] on any careful examination of the facts of life, what we call good frequently turns out to be bad and what we call bad frequently turns out to be good. It appears that God's definitions of good and evil are not always the same as ours. This should not be surprising, for our definitions of good are always more or less bound up with our own selfish desires and it is only an inordinate arrogance that would insist that they are always what God calls good.[5] Moreover, if our definitions of good and evil are the absolute and final definitions, then it becomes obvious that there is no solution to the problem of evil, for very few, if any, people do achieve the good life even in terms of their own definitions. And even if it were true (which it is not) that most men were able to achieve the good life, as long as there were one single solitary person who failed, the problem would still remain. A single failure would mean that God had created a being He could not or would not save. Such a position is irreconcilable with His self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

The solution of the problem, if there is to be any solution at all, must lie in recognizing that as far as human judgments are concerned God is beyond good and evil. This does not mean that God Himself has no standards of good and evil,

[4] See especially pp. 34 f.

[5] This position is substantiated by an objective anthropological study of cultures. All societies have more or less rigid systems of virtues and vices, but what is a virtue in one society is a vice in another. It is only a combination of group ignorance, arrogance and fear that makes one society insist that its culture pattern is the absolutely true cultural pattern. See *Patterns of Culture* by Ruth Benedict.

but that His standards go beyond and at times negate human standards. Thus wrote the Unknown Prophet of the Exile: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." [6] It is also worth noting in this connection that when the rich young ruler came to Jesus and addressed him as "Good Teacher," Jesus replied: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." [7]

Pie in the Sky

The critical reader may now say, "All of this sounds very well, but aren't you really destroying any basis for ethics? In the first place your emphasis on the Eternal leads to an otherworldly mysticism which denies the significance of what we do now, and your insistence that God is beyond good and evil and that we can never really know what is good simply destroys any basis for ethics. How can you insist on the need for righteous living when you deny that we know what is right?" The objections are well taken and they deserve a proper answer. It will be easier to consider the matter in its two parts and then try to put them together.

In the latter part of the last century, there arose among labor leaders, radicals, and social reformers a derogatory characterization of Christianity which characterized it as "Pie in the sky by and by." [8] These critics claimed that Christianity was only concerned with offering people a very hypothetical and (in their opinion) doubtful happy next

[6] Isaiah 55:8, 9.
[7] Mark 10:17, 18.
[8] Marx also characterized religion as "the opiate of the people."

world if they were good and accepted their unenviable lot in this world without complaint, particularly without upsetting the *status quo*. There was probably a good deal of justification in their criticism, but for at least two or three generations now "enlightened Christians" have been vigorously denying both in word and action that Christianity advocates "Pie in the sky by and by." Nothing makes them madder than to have this statement thrown in their faces. They insist that Christianity is not only concerned, but is irrevocably committed to doing all that is possible to see that men and women get their "pie" here and now. They are exceedingly suspicious of any interpretation of Christianity, such as the one offered here, which might lead to such an escapism and thereby lessen the demands for working for brotherhood here and now.

These Christian people have a sound Christian insight. Christianity is a religion that must be lived where we are. And we are in this world. It is a faith for living—living nobly and sacrificially in the world. However, it is perhaps more possible today than it was a generation ago to reexamine the Gospel without fear of reaction. In a very real sense, Christianity does offer "pie in the sky by and by." It is a religion with an other-worldly goal. This statement, however, does not mean that it does not have a deep concern for what happens in this world, it is only a misinterpretation of Christianity which causes anyone to think so.

For one thing, if there is not "pie in the sky by and by," for millions of people there is no pie at all. In a small Vermont village where I once was minister of a church, there was a poor unfortunate living in a squalid upper room of a tenement and kept alive by the town poor allotment. He

had no family, and, some years before, while working in a lumber yard, he had suffered an accident; a pile of lumber had fallen on him. Now he had to live out his days broken in body, confined to that room, crawling from wheelchair to bed and back again. I do not know that I did anything for him, but he did a lot for me. He taught me that if there were to be anything for him to hope for, to give meaning to his life, it had to be something more than "the revolution" (whether the revolution be thought of in Marxian terms or in terms of simple evolutionary utopianism). Secular reformers can say easily enough: "Yes. It's too bad. He's a pathetic casualty. We must go out to make a world in which in the future that kind of casualty will not happen."

Christians can never be satisfied with such a statement. Regardless of what happens in the future and assuming that we will by one means or another create an Utopia (an eventuality which Christianity denies to be possible on this earth),[9] if the only hope my friend had were a world which he will never live to see, Christianity has no relevance for him and the whole Christian assertion about the goodness of God breaks down. So does the hope of *any* "pie" for him. He must live his life in futility, as do and have done untold millions of others, compared to whom his lot was really fortunate.

If this be true, it means that either there is no God or if there be, He has created a being whom He doomed and could not or would not save. In the latter case God is a fiend. The alternative that there is no God at all is preferable even though it is a position of complete despair. If there is

[9] For a fuller treatment of this statement see my *Faith of a Protestant,* Macmillan Company, 1946.

no "pie in the sky" there is no pie at all except for the relatively very few who get the fortunate breaks. The conception of the importance of eternity and an eternal justice and fulfillment is not an escape device; it is the only interpretation there is that can give life, and particularly suffering, significance, hope and meaning. For thinking Christianly, particularly in regard to the problems of suffering and ethics, it is essential to understand this.

The phrase, "pie in the sky by and by" is not an inappropriate characterization of Christianity, but it seems to us inappropriate for another reason, namely, that the full meaning of Christianity and the relationship of the temporal to the eternal have not been made clear to us. Properly understood, Christianity says that the amount of "pie" a man gets "in the sky by and by" depends entirely upon what he tries to do in this life here and now. A man's hope for heavenly pie is determined by what he does and intends on earth. To push the analogy further it might be said that in this life we make the ingredients that will go into the pie we will have to eat "by and by." Unfortunately, and this is why the phrase has had its cutting edge, it has been all too frequently interpreted to mean that the ingredients have been made of submission to human authorities, especially ecclesiastical, and observance of ritualistic formulae—the kind of legalism St. Paul attacked so vigorously. This is the reason why Christianity has so often appeared as an escape from reality, the "opiate of the people." All too often the practice of many Christians and of the churches has justified such a criticism. Actually Christianity is not a denial of this world. It is not an escape religion. To interpret it as such is as serious a distortion as to interpret it simply as an

ethical culture movement. Even the most mystical and other-worldly of the New Testament writers, the author of the Johannine literature, wrote: "If any one says 'I love God' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." [10]

Christianity insists on an other-worldly, an eternal end. It insists upon it not as an escape device but because it represents the truth about man's situation. It is not without significance that this truth offers the only way there is to give the fullest meaning to life and to make ethical action valid.

Consider the home and the problem of marriage and divorce. Whatever the external causes of the breakup of homes may be, at the heart there is always a basic selfishness. One or the other of the partners, and usually both, become dissatisfied because "I can't have my way." Seldom, of course, do they put it so blatantly; usually they are unaware that this is what they are saying. But in the last analysis each member feels himself or herself a person with inalienable rights that even the spouse must cater to or at least respect. Most young couples go into marriage completely unaware of the selfishness of their own desires. They think that they love the beloved for his or her own sake. Actually to a very large degree they love the beloved because the beloved thinks, or appears to think that the lover is pretty wonderful—which bolsters the ego. It is very satisfying to have someone think we are wonderful. Quite understandably we overestimate the wisdom and understanding of the person who thinks we are wonderful.

[10] 1 John 4:20.

There is also a very possessive element with the accompanying desire for power in all married love.[11] This is inevitable because it is part of human nature. The time will always come when there are real conflicts of selfish desire, interest or prestige. The only solution in such conflicts is for both parties to achieve a perspective that sees that there is something more important than the individual's personal desires, that there is something—the home—that stands above each to which each has a higher responsibility than to himself. Without this perspective the marriage is headed for the rocks whether it ends in a divorce court or not. And one basic reason for the rising divorce rate is the number of people who are consciously or unconsciously taking it for granted that they are the center of their world.

But the home is not a high enough value either. Important as the home is (and it is very important) it is fatal for it to become an end in itself. For one thing, homes do break up. They break up too easily today, but even the strongest home is eventually broken by death if not before. A man who puts his highest good in terms of his home puts it in something that cannot last. More importantly, particularly from the Christian point of view, homes, when they become ends in themselves do become selfish. This selfishness seeps down into the members and makes for an introversion and narrowness

[11] One solution for domestic difficulties widely advocated is to have a "frank heart-to-heart talk"—"get the difficulties out into the open." Doubtless there is some real value in this procedure. It is better than letting resentments pile up. Nevertheless I am suspicious. As I have gone along and analyzed my own motives, I have discovered that usually what I meant by a "frank discussion" was truly a subtle device to make my wife submit to my point of view. The only time I initiated such discussion was when I felt *my* interests were not properly maintained.

that can be fatal. "Me, my wife, our son John, his wife, us four, no more" is an impossible conception of a Christian home, and it is a pretty bad one, sociologically speaking. The home, to become a true home, must have a reference and a sense of responsibility beyond itself which the home and all the members in it recognize.[12] Ultimately this reference must be God—the Eternal.

Consider the racial problem. On pragmatic and even on humanitarian grounds alone, an intelligent person might well conclude, as many have, that interracial antagonisms are ridiculous and also very dangerous. The pigmented races far outnumber the members of the white race in the world. "Enlightened self-interest" alone dictates that this situation be faced realistically. In the last analysis, there are only two intelligent positions to take: either to maintain white supremacy at all costs, or to welcome and try to hasten racial equality. Without any reference to an eternal moral order or justice, the judgment as to which of these two methods is preferable is essentially a subjective matter of guess work—which will protect my interest better—and any man's opinion is as justifiable as another's. Without an eternal moral order that stands above and judges our actions, the man who advocates lynching is just as righteous as the man who devotes his life to overcoming racial antagonism. There is no reason whatsoever for my treating a Negro, or anyone else for that matter, decently, if I can "get away" with exploiting him, unless I realize that we both stand under a moral judgment that goes beyond the realities of this world, a moral judgment eternally guaranteed by a God before whom I shall have to answer how I have treated him.

[12] It is hard to carry on a family quarrel through a church service.

This same principle can be applied to every area of social activity, but I shall not bother the reader with further illustrations. The simple fact is that properly understood, Christian "other-worldliness" does not destroy ethics; it undergirds ethics and gives it the only basis there is. Furthermore when a man has a firm sense of his eternal destiny and judgment he is not as concerned about the apparent success or failure of his activity. He knows that he is judged not by what men think about him but by what God thinks about him. He has a freedom and an incentive that other men cannot have to do the job which he sees to be done, no matter how unpopular.[13]

What Is Good and What Is Evil

We may see now that an understanding of the Eternal is necessary to any Christian ethics, but does not the idea that God is beyond human judgments of good and evil and that we as human beings do not know what is truly good and what is truly bad—does this not destroy any ethics? It may destroy secular ethics. About that I have no judgment. It does not destroy Christian ethics, although it may alter pretty radically some of what has passed for Christian ethics.

I assume that the discussion in Chapter 3 where I first raised this problem was sufficiently illustrative to indicate

[13] Admittedly, few of us even approximate the ideal because of our self-concern, timidity and lack of trust in God. This, however, does not negate the principle. Without an other-worldly reference Christian ethics become meaningless.

that there is a real problem. The fact is that over and over again what seems to be good turns out badly and that good often emerges from seemingly impossibly bad situations. This led to the statement that "We do not know what is true good and true bad." At the time, this stated exactly what was meant, but now it needs some modification which can be expressed only in paradoxical terms: We do not know what is truly good and we do know what is truly good. This statement needs some amplification.

It is widely understood among Christians (to whom this book is primarily addressed) that according to Christianity the *summum bonum* is the submission of the individual to a God who is loving and trustworthy, and that this submission requires an attitude of love on the part of the Christian. This view is held so widely that I do not need to argue the point. We fail to achieve perfection in this matter in varying degrees, but we know that it is what we ought to do. This submission is the beginning point for all Christian thinking. This is also the one Good that we know. We know that we ought to live according to the law of love. What we do not know is how to make the love operate or how to practice it. This fact is not as widely recognized as it should be. It is the point where much harder thinking must be done. Whenever we start to apply the law of love, relative human opinions, born out of an impossibly tangled combination of influences, color our judgments. Many of these influences are unconscious, but they are none the less real. One need not endorse everything in Marxism to recognize that Karl Marx performed a real if painful service in exposing the degree to which economic status determines the political, social, and even religious feelings of people. We all derive certain values

from our cultural pattern and familiar environment.[14] Then we tend to give these values religious sanction. This characteristic of man is as old as recorded history. We never shall be able to escape it completely. Consequently two different people of equal sincerity and piety, because of their different social, political, economic—in a word environmental—backgrounds, often will have two different ideas of how the law of love should be applied in a given situation.

A very simple but pertinent illustration of this is revealed by the attitudes of Christians during the War. Most Christians in this country, while recognizing that the War was bad,[15] felt that the cause of love would be served better by getting into the War, once it had started, and ending it as soon as possible even though this involved inflicting suffering for a time. Others, a smaller group, but equally sincere Christians, believed that the law of love demanded that they refuse to inflict suffering under any circumstances and thus they became "conscientious objectors." I happen to belong to the first group and can build up what seems to me a sound defense of the position, but I have Christian pacifist friends who are equally convinced that their position is more sound. Which is right? In the last analysis, none of us knows in any absolute sense; only God knows. Thus we are faced with a paradoxical situation: We know it is right to live by the law of love, but we do not know how to apply the law of love perfectly in any given situation because all our in-

[14] *Patterns of Culture* by Ruth Benedict is very instructive at this point.

[15] I think it is hopefully significant that as a whole the churches in World War II did not as unqualifiedly and self-righteously defend the rightness of the War as they did in World War I. Also their defense and help to those of their members who were conscientious objectors, while not enough, was much better than in War I.

terpretations of the law of love include influences, desires, etc, which are something other than the law of love.

Is there any solution to this dilemma? The only solution there is is the solution of faith. It involves recognizing that God is good and at the same time that His ways are not our ways. The human situation described in the preceding paragraph can be described as human finiteness. It becomes obvious that God in working out His good purposes must work through and with finite creatures. Since these finite creatures are always imposing their finite and prejudiced ideas of good on the ultimate good, it follows that God must be a God who uses the "wrath of men to praise him." [16] There is no other way possible for Him. Consequently God must take the intentions and efforts of men and bring about results that the men neither intended nor anticipated, and sometimes do not even like. In other words, it seems that God works dialectically.

Such an interpretation is still not completely satisfactory. As it stands, it still leaves God something of a fiend or at least a chess-player who moves and sacrifices his pawns according to His desire or need in order to win the game; and it leaves the individual in a hopeless state as far as ethical living is concerned, for nothing that he does seems to matter. If I try to do right it will probably be wrong, and if I try to do wrong, it will probably be right. In neither case can I know. But no matter what I do or don't do God will bring good out of it. So why try to do anything?

Revolutionary as it may seem in one sense, this is a correct interpretation of Christianity. No matter what we do or do not do, God will bring His good purposes to their final con-

[16] Psalm 76: 10 "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee."

clusion in His own good time. On any other basis, God is not God or at least not the God of Christian faith. At the same time it is tremendously important what we do, or more properly what we intend and try to do. What is it that we must do? What is the one sure thing a Christian can rightfully know he can do or at least try to do? *He must submit himself in trust and obedience to the God revealed in Our Lord Jesus Christ.* And this is all that he can do in certainty.

In practical terms this means that what we have to do is the best that we can see to do in the light of the circumstances we face, as God gives us grace. It is here that faith becomes real and trust is truly tested in life. A man must have faith that if he follows the highest that he knows, regardless of what other people think, he becomes eligible for the Kingdom of God. What one man sees as the highest and best in a given situation may be quite different from what another man sees, because, as we have seen, all our prospectives are partial and conditioned. Both men have to do that which they honestly believe they must do even though it brings them into conflict on the level of this world. In so far as they try to do the highest they see, they are both justified before God. Thus the headhunter, in so far as he sincerely believes that headhunting is the highest good, has an absolute obligation to be a good headhunter. If he is a good and sincere headhunter he is just as justified before God as the missionary who loses his life trying to convert him. And if by chance the missionary was not following the highest that he knew (an unlikely assumption, used only to sharpen the point), the headhunter would be more justified than the missionary. The one obligation a man has is to follow the highest that he knows. In so far as he falls short of that he

sins. It is incredible that God should judge any person on anything other than the highest that he (the person) knows.

In actual practice, then, a man should do that which he sees to be the highest in the light of the best knowledge that God has given him. *For the Christian, of course, it means in the light of the law of love revealed in Jesus Christ.* Once a Christian has come to the conclusion that the law of Christ for him requires such-and-such an action, that is what he must do even though he must oppose equally sincere Christians who have a different understanding. In so far as both people are Christians, they have a right, even a duty, to try to persuade the other to adopt a different course. If no agreement can be reached, each must follow his own course, but in humility recognizing the sincerity of his opponent and recognizing that out of the opposition, God, in His infinite wisdom, will bring forth good. Thus during the War many Christian pacifists and Christian non-pacifists opposed each other vigorously and at the same time could have fellowship and even worship together. Thus the Christian churches maintained their ecumenical fellowship through the War. In this world because of our partial perspectives we may have to oppose each other, but before God, in so far as we sincerely try to accomplish the highest that we see, all are "right" and all enter into a reward concerning which this world knows nothing.

Needless to say, before a man makes a final commitment in any highly controversial issue he needs not only hard prayer and deep searching of the mind of Christ for himself, he also needs to take into consideration the best opinion of the fellowship of Christians which is the Church. *Our insights are so partial and our prejudices are so strong that,*

as anyone who has sincerely prayed knows, it is terribly easy to interpret our own will as God's will. We need to test our judgment against the accumulated judgment of the Church of Christ. Only on rare occasions will a Christian go "completely on his own." After, however, searching for the mind of Christ in prayer, in the Bible, in worship and in consultation with fellow Christians, the individual Christian must do the thing as he sees it must be done and let God take care of the consequences.

Nicolas Berdyaev in his discussion of heaven and hell in *The Destiny of Man* illuminates this whole point of view. In that discussion Berdyaev says (I think profoundly) that from the human point of view the idea of a heaven and a hell are absolutely essential. It is essential for human thinking that there be a real distinction between the good and the bad and that the bad be ultimately cast out and the good permanently established. This is what heaven and hell stand for. This conception is necessary if there is to be any sense to human ethics. But from God's point of view the idea of heaven and hell is impossible. If one single solitary soul in all history goes to hell, it means that God has failed, that God has created a soul He could not or would not redeem. Such a proposition is impossible, Christianly speaking. Were one soul to go to hell it would make nonsense of the Cross, the Incarnation, and the Atonement. Futher, it would mean that God is either not good or not powerful and such a position is untenable, for reasons that we have already considered.

These observations of Berdyaev illuminate our present discussion. In this world we must have ideas about right and wrong, we must uphold the right that we see and must do

all in our power to live the law of love in every area of life. In so doing we will often be mistaken because of our pride and our conditioning. That does not ultimately matter. We must still try to do the highest; in God's eternity He judges us with an understanding that surpasses human understanding and a mercy that surpasses human mercy. Wrote St. Paul: "For God has consigned all men to disobedience that He may have mercy upon all." [17]

[17] Romans 11:32.

7

*The Strategy of the Remnant**

THE CHURCH TODAY FACES A TREMENDOUS CHALLENGE and opportunity. It also faces tremendous misunderstanding, indifference and sometimes opposition. Paul's characterization of the situation he faced in Ephesus accurately describes our situation: "for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries." [1] What should the Church do? This question is a big one and a controversial one, with varied answers having different champions, many of them more informed than I. Nevertheless the logic of this little volume seems to require that the position here maintained be applied to the question of church strategy. Without intending this as any final or authoritative statement but merely hoping that it will stimulate thinking Christianly, I shall attempt to deal with this question in the present chapter.

First, we should appraise the situation. When this is done in any sense realistically it can be seen that the Church is distinctly a small minority movement. In the world as a whole Christians are a very small portion of the total popula-

* This chapter originally appeared as an article in *Theology Today*, June, 1948.

[1] I Corinthians 16:9.

tion. Even in a so-called Christian country like the United States the Church is still a minority group. Actually in this country the total membership of all churches amounts to around fifty-two per cent of the population.[2] Technically, I presume that this is a majority. If, however, fifty per cent of this church membership is truly Christian [3] we are more fortunate than I suspect. Granting that there are always the "seven thousand, all the knees of which have not bowed unto Baal," [4] any realistic appraisal would be unduly optimistic if it placed the total Christian group above twenty or twenty-five per cent of the population and this estimate is probably high. We, who try to be Christians, are a small minority. We shall get further if we recognize this fact and develop a strategy that begins with the position we actually hold in society rather than with assuming we are a larger group than we are.

Our smallness should not be in the least disturbing. The reason many Christians find it disturbing is that they have so absorbed the American cultural pattern that they unconsciously think of bigness and success in worldly terms. To admit smallness makes them fearful of the future. It is time to remind ourselves and others that the Church is Christ's Church and that nothing can happen to it. Its success depends not on its size nor even upon the degree to which the world listens to its advice. One of the peculiar characteristics

[2] For Protestant Churches this figure includes only people who have actually joined a church by public confession of faith. It does not include all baptized persons as it does in the Roman Catholic Church.

[3] By Christian, I mean persons who try to make their Christian faith the dominating influence in their lives, the criterion by which every action and decision is made, and who recognize a higher loyalty and responsibility to the Church than to any other institution or activity.

[4] I Kings 19:18.

of the Church is that it has frequently been strongest and most effective when smallest and most despised, and it has frequently been least effective and spiritually weakest when apparently most powerful and dominating. Nothing illustrates better the degree to which God's judgments simply set aside human judgments than the history of the Church. Moreover, according to the Bible, the Church always has been and, until the Last Judgment, always will be a minority proposition. It is a saved and a saving remnant. To think Christianly about the strategy of the Church is to think out a strategy for the Remnant.

Biblical and Historical Evidence for the Remnant

Historically, the idea of an indestructible Remnant which becomes the continuing saved and saving leaven in society appears first in the eighth-century B.C. Prophets, notably Hosea and Isaiah, but it is basic to the whole Old Testament position. Hebrew history is more significant than the history of other tribes and races only because it represents a "Remnant" in relation to the total population of the world,[5] through which God acted to reveal His way of redemption of mankind. Why God chose to act in this way no man can say. Some wit once wrote a little verse:

How odd
Of God
To choose
The Jews.

[5] For thou art a holy people unto Jehovah thy God. Jehovah thy God hath chosen thee to be a people for his own possession above all the peoples that are upon the face of the earth. Jehovah did not set his love upon you, nor choose you because ye were more in number than any people; For ye were the fewest of all peoples. Deut. 7:6–7.

From a strictly human point of view I suppose it is odd. But as I have tried to make clear, much of what God does seems odd to us because of our lack of understanding. The fact remains that He did choose the Jews and that immediately implies the idea of a Remnant. And within the Hebrew race there was a still smaller Remnant: those who were obedient and who truly trusted. It is Abraham and not Lot; it is Jacob and not Esau; it is those who go with Moses and not all the Hebrews, and the wilderness experience is further winnowing of this group. In the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, it is the exiles in Babylon and not the people left in Jerusalem and Palestine. Old Testament history can be understood only in terms of the Remnant.

Although the New Testament does not speak explicitly of the Remnant,[6] the idea is implicit throughout. At least from the time of the exile if not before, not only the ethics but the spiritual teaching of Jesus which undergirds His ethics is directed to the few who can and will accept it. His disciples are the "salt" [7] and the "leaven," [8] not the whole loaf. They are to "go into the thoroughfares" [9] and preach the Gospel to "all the world," [10] but there is no expectation that all the world will accept the faith. "For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." [11]

In such parables as that of The Sheep and the Goats,[12]

[6] Only Paul (and only in Romans 9:27 and 11:5) uses the term.
[7] Matthew 5:13.
[8] Matthew 13:33, Luke 13:21.
[9] Matthew 22:9.
[10] Matthew 24:14.
[11] Matthew 7:14.
[12] Matthew 25:31–46.

The Wheat and the Tares [13] and The Vineyard,[14] there is a sharp distinction between what we now not illogically call the Church and the world. This distinction is to remain "until the Lord come." [15] "Many are called but few are chosen" [16] is an essential part of Jesus' thought. If anything, St. John's Gospel makes this Remnant idea more forceful than do the Synoptic Gospels. There is no expectation that the world can or will appreciate the significance of Our Lord or His work; indeed, in the great seventeenth chapter Jesus prays explicitly: "I am not praying for the world but for those whom Thou hast given me." [17] Regardless of what school of Biblical criticism is followed, the testimony of the Gospels, both the Synoptics and John, is unanimous on this point. Jesus, His teaching and His work, can only be understood as training and establishing a Remnant, which because it is God's Remnant becomes the saved and saving group in history.

It does not seem necessary to make here a detailed study of the New Testament. But it is obvious to any careful reader that this idea of the Remnant is essential to any understanding of the whole New Testament. The book of The Acts is a history of the Remnant; the burden of Paul's letters is to instruct the Remnant how they must believe, live and act in distinction from other people of the time. The same is true of other epistles, and of Revelation, which for all its "wild symbolical writing" is a discussion of the destiny of the Remnant which will remain a Remnant to the end of time. When

[13] Matthew 13:24–30.
[14] Mark 12: 1–11.
[15] I Corinthians 4:5. See also Mark 12:9; John 14:3 and 28.
[16] Matthew 22:14.
[17] John 17:9. See also John 1:10–13.

we go behind the difficulty of the form, the Book of Revelation is in essential agreement with the whole New Testament position. I am not a church historian but it seems to me that the thought of the early Church Fathers, men like St. Augustine, and the Reformation Fathers, men like Calvin, Luther, and later, Wesley, can be understood only in terms of their trying to maintain a purified Remnant through which God can and will act.

Significantly, this whole Biblical position of the role of the Remnant is substantiated by a modern empirical historian, Arnold J. Toynbee. Even those who are critical of some of Toynbee's conclusions agree with his supporters that his six volumes: *Study of History* [18] comprise one of the greatest if not *the* greatest study of history that has ever been made. This is not the place for a full report of the *Study of History*, Suffice it to say that, as the informed are aware, in this work, Toynbee, with penetrating and at times daring insight, tries to find out why civilizations come to birth and grow, and why they disintegrate and die. Much that Toynbee says would be illuminating. However, two major points which he makes are particularly significant for the present discussion.

One of these points is the role of what Toynbee calls the "Creative Minority" in the births and growths of civilizations. Civilizations come to birth when a given social group successfully meets a given challenge, and they continue to grow as they continue successfully to meet subsequent challenges. The society as a whole, however, does not know enough to be able to meet the challenges. The successful re-

[18] Oxford University Press. Three more volumes are promised but at this writing have not yet appeared.

sponses always originate in a much smaller inner group which understands both the real nature of the challenge and also what is required. This smaller inner group leads the larger group because it has the creative solution which the larger masses, when shown, recognize as correct. It is this smaller inner group that Toynbee calls the "Creative Minority." It is the most significant group in the births and continued growths of civilization. As long as the Creative Minority remains creative, the civilization continues to develop; when it ceases to be creative, it becomes a "Dominant Minority" and seeks to rule by power and violence. Unless a new Creative Minority can arise, that particular civilization is on the road to doom. Without going into more detail, there seems to be an obvious connection between the role of the Remnant and the role of the Creative Minority. This connection should not be pushed too far, for all Creative Minorities tend eventually to lose their creativity.[19] However, the Creative Minority always arises from a group, perhaps very small, which has "withdrawn" from society's struggles in order to gain a deeper perspective. The Biblical remnant may well represent the permanent reservoir of those who have withdrawn to gain this deeper perspective. Certainly as we look at the Biblical panorama, it is clear that it always was the Remnant which saw the situation realistically and had the creative solution which survived.

The second major point of Toynbee's which I wish to mention bears out this whole position from a slightly differ-

[19] It is uncommon for a Creative Minority to remain creative in the face of two or more challenges (Vol. IV, p. 245). A new Creative Minority must arise and usually has to do its work "in the teeth" of the Dominant Minority (Vol. V, p. 34).

ent angle. It is the role Toynbee assigns to the Universal Churches. Universal Churches are the "institutions," if one may use that word, which alone survive the breakdowns of civilization and which provide the most important link between two consecutive civilizations.[20] In fact, so striking is this capacity of the Church to survive the death of one civilization and provide the germ or Creative Minority for the next civilization that Toynbee writes:

> When we examine the Universal Churches we shall find ourselves led to raise the question whether the Churches can really be comprehended in their entirety in the framework of the histories of civilizations, within which they make the first historical appearance, or whether we have not to regard them as representatives of *another species of society.*[21]

It is, I think, of very great significance that a modern empirical historian in the most painstaking study of history yet attempted is driven to conclude that a Universal Church is "another species" of society which is subject neither to the same fate nor the same judgments as other human institutions, including the institution of society itself.

Professor Toynbee does not discuss the idea of the Remnant as such; neither does he put these two points in the juxtaposition I do. Nevertheless, when we put the idea of the role of the Creative Minority and the role of the Uni-

[20] The term which Toynbee uses is "Apparentation—and—Affiliation." See Vol. I., p. 568.

[21] From *Study of History,* Vol. V, p. 23, by Arnold J. Toynbee. Copyright 1946 by Oxford University Press, New York. (Italics mine). Toynbee expresses this same idea in a number of other places, but his final discussion is part of the still unpublished volumes.

versal Church together we find something that strongly suggests the Biblical idea of the role of the Remnant. It seems not illogical to say that here we find an empirical modern historian verifying the Biblical conception, namely, that the decisive and permanent group in history is the Remnant. The Remnant is decisive and permanent because it depends not on man or on man's creations but upon God.[22]

If this be true, the strategy of the Church for our time or for any time must be the strategy of the Remnant. Not enough thinking has been done on all that this involves for any one man to speak dogmatically. I shall not consider this chapter a total loss if it does nothing more than make people aware of the need to think in terms of the Remnant. I should, however, like to make some suggestions for whatever they may be worth.

The Independence of the Remnant

First of all there is needed a more careful study of the strategy of the Remnant as it is revealed in the Bible and in church history in order that we may understand better how it has operated in previous critical periods. Without going into this detailed study and perhaps to oversimplify somewhat, the outstanding fact about the Remnant in any period is that it achieved a perspective which was relatively independent of its culture and consequently it could see at least enough of the weaknesses to offer constructive if not popular solutions. Frequently the weaknesses required judgment

[22] Incidentally Toynbee, I believe, would support this interpretation. See Vol. VI, pp. 146 ff.

and the solutions required revolution. But both the judgment could be made and the revolution carried out because the members of the Remnant trusted God to act in and through them. Thus Moses could make and succeed in accomplishing the stupendously audacious proposal that a group of urbanized slaves revolt and flee to the wilderness; Jeremiah and Ezekiel could tell their people that God was not in the Jewish civilization of Palestine and Jerusalem but with the exiles in Babylon; the early Christian Church could revolt from its Jewish heritage—a revolt far more revolutionary than most Christians realize—and establish itself in a pagan world; and the Reformers could insist that if the saving Remnant was to persist it must revolt from the mediæval Roman Catholic cultural pattern.

All that such an attitude involves in our time is not completely clear. This much seems certain: Christianity, both Protestant and Roman, has too completely identified itself with the secular cultural pattern. It must break that identification and assert its independence. We cannot migrate physically through a new wilderness to a new promised land, but we can, like the Reformers of the sixteenth century, seek a new (new only in the sense that it is an application of the old to a new situation), independent Biblical understanding of our time. Such an understanding would make clear, no matter how painful, that the validity and success of the Christian faith has nothing to do with the preservation of western civilization. The Bible says nothing about Christianity (or Judaism, for that matter) saving any society; rather, the Bible is abundantly clear in stating that all societies are under the Judgment of Doom—only the Kingdom of God which on this earth is represented by the Remnant,

the Church [23]—is permanent. Judaism did not save Egyptian civilization and neither did it save the Jewish state. Christianity did not save the Roman Empire and it did not save feudal civilization. There is no reason to assume that it can or will save western civilization. What Christianity did was to save men and women in a doomed Roman and a doomed feudal society because it offered them a kingdom not dependent on men. In like manner, Christianity in our day may not—and in the long run will not—save western civilization. But if Christians witness to the Gospel, they will be the saved and saving Remnant of our civilizations. To quote again from Toynbee, this time from the Barge Memorial Lecture, 1940:

> . . . then we must revise the whole of our present conception of modern history. . . . Our present view of modern history focuses attention on the rise of our modern Western secular culture as the latest great new event in history. As we follow that rise . . . through the Renaissance to the eruption of democracy and science and modern scientific technique, we think of all this as being the great new event in the world which demands our attention and commands our admiration. If we can bring ourselves to think of it, instead, as one of the vain repetitions of the Gentiles—an almost meaningless repetition of something that the Greeks and Romans did before us and did supremely well—then the greatest new event of mankind will be seen to be a very different one. The greatest new event will then not be the monotonous rise of yet another secular civilization . . . it will be the Crucifixion and its spiritual consequences. . . . If it is civilization that is the means and religion that is the end—then, once again, a civilization may

[23] In the rest of this chapter the terms "the Church" and "the Remnant" are used interchangeably. This is done deliberately. In my thought the True Church is the Remnant and the Remnant is the True Church.

break down and break away, but the replacement of one higher religion by another will not be a necessary consequence. So far from that, if our secular Western civilization perishes, Christianity may be expected not only to endure but to grow in wisdom and stature as a result of a fresh experience of secular catastrophe.[24]

The Remnant and Power Politics

If there be any truth in this analysis at all, two conclusions become apparent. One is that it is the Church—the Remnant—which survives and persists in spite of appearances; the other is that the Remnant's ability to survive depends to a large degree upon its ability to trust God and to become independent of the secular, cultural pattern in which it lives.

Social analysis provides a field day for all sorts of people. It is something like a magician's hat—you can pull out almost anything you want, provided you have surreptitiously put it in first. It is not my intention to enter extensively this arena, yet it seems safe to say that one of the most dominant cultural patterns of the twentieth century, if not the most dominant, is the worship of power and power-politics. So much has been written on this subject that it seems unnecessary for me to rehearse it.

The worship of power is not merely a contemporary condition; it is always with us. Nevertheless, in the twentieth

[24] From "Christianity and Civilization" by Arnold J. Toynbee, from *Civilization on Trial,* copyright 1948 by Oxford University Press, Inc. Again, "If religion is a chariot, it looks as if the wheels on which it mounts to Heaven may be the periodic downfalls of civilization on Earth. It looks as if the movement of civilization may be cyclic and recurrent, while the movement of religion may be a single continuous upward line" (pp. 235–6).

century, it has become both more acute and more attractive because of the tremendous resources of power we have discovered and the apparent success power has in achieving certain goals. Human nature being what it is, it is inevitable that the Churches have at least partially succumbed to the temptation of "the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them." [25] Yet our Lord emphatically rejected this temptation and therefore it is at this point as much as at any other that the Church must break with our cultural pattern. To do this will be terribly hard. It will mean at times seeing those things we care for most "taking a beating." But if we are to learn anything from the Biblical and historical life of the Remnant we know that worldly power defeats itself and that the Remnant survives by a power not dependent on men.

The tragic fact is that at this writing (Spring 1948) faith in power-politics seems to be increasing rather than decreasing. It is perhaps too early to say that the United Nations Organization has completely failed. It still provides some kind of an open forum where the nations can come together, and in its non-political work it has some very valuable contributions to make. Certainly this is a case where half a loaf, or even a tenth of a loaf, is better than no loaf at all. But it is also obvious that for the present the United Nations Organization has been by-passed. We seem to-day to be repeating the history of the nineteen-thirties, only at a much faster tempo. As Reinhold Niebuhr has written, "Nobody, in fact, has learned as much from the world catastrophe in which we have all been involved as we thought. The most disheartening aspect of the modern world is just the fact that nations

[25] Matthew 4:8.

and peoples, classes and ideological groups have learned so little." [26] That is our tragedy and if the Christian Church is to have something saving to say it must learn something from recent history and find a new creative approach. This requires some understanding of the nature of the struggle of our time as seen from a Christian perspective.

In the mid-twentieth century there appear to be three major competitors for political power: The United States, Russia and the Roman Catholic Church.[27] It also appears that in this conflict the power of the United States and of the Roman Catholic Church under a banner of "The Defenders of Christian Civilization" will be lined up against Russia which will be labeled, indeed is already labeled, "The Arch-enemy of Christianity and Democracy." And there will unquestionably be some truth in these labels and in this juxtaposition. There is some truth but it is oversimplified!

As a number of our abler observers have been pointing out for some time, we are living at the "End of an Era" which may well be the end of the civilization produced in the last four hundred years; if not, it is certainly a period of revolutionary change in the fullest meaning of the word "revolutionary." As always happens in such a period various groups try to assert themselves and each tries to organize life around its particular principles. Unfortunately in our time the major contending groups have so completely absolutized their own particular interpretations that they have

[26] *Christianity and Society,* Summer Issue, 1947.

[27] This does not mean that Great Britain or some other country may not ultimately have a significant role to play. Britain's experiments in qualified socialism or, say, the Scandinavian experiments in cooperatives may be far more important in the long run than realized to-day. At present, however, they are not major sources of political power.

become intolerant of any other position. *Thus the mid-twentieth century is a period of a struggle of absolutisms for world political power.* It is in these terms that the present world situation must be understood.

A moment ago I said that the three major contenders for world power are the United States, Russia, and the Roman Catholic Church. Each of these three in a different way represents a kind of absolutism. That Russia represents an uncompromising political and economic absolutism needs no elaboration, but it is important to realize that Russia also represents a religious absolutism in that it demands and receives the complete devotion of men, and that it unqualifiedly maintains that its interpretation of the meaning of life is the absolute Truth which is undergirded by the nature of the universe. Thus the Soviet is dominated by and acts upon the absolute rightness of its conception of history; it claims to be the sole depository of Truth, and therefore it is justified in doing all in its power to overcome the errors of the rest of the world and to defend itself against those errors. It is not so often realized that the Roman Catholic Church is also a religious-political absolutism. Its political arrangements are unique and ingenious. On the one hand it is a political institution and a legal state (the Vatican State) which, where possible, enters into legal treaties with other states. On the other hand it pretends to be above politics by getting secular agencies, preferably legal governments, to carry out or enforce its desires. But the Roman Church also claims that it is the sole depository of Truth, that it alone is capable of organizing a good society, and that anything is justifiable in overcoming the errors of the rest of the world or in defending itself against those errors. In countries where the Roman

Church is strong, like Spain or Argentina, it blesses, supports, and receives privileged benefits from states which are almost as ruthless as the Communists in their treatment of those who disagree. The reason for the mutual vigorous criticism of each other by these two powers is that each recognizes in the other a center of religious-political absolutism which denies its own position.[28]

In this situation the United States plays a secondary role. On the surface America probably has the greatest political power of the three because of its vast industrial development. Actually, however, in a struggle of absolutisms the American position is not as potent as appears on the surface.

Americans have a kind of absolutism too, but it is qualified and undermined by a number of factors which makes it less robust. On the one hand, Americans are quite convinced that the "American Way," which includes the trinity of political democracy, the right of private property and free enterprise, is the best way for all mankind. One of the difficulties of the present time is that we Americans cannot understand why other peoples do not instinctively see the virtue of our system and adopt it. On the other hand, the American absolutism is qualified. First of all, the "American Way" has, or at least has had up until the present, a principle of toleration and a respect for those who differ which makes it diffi-

[28] In spite of this it is not impossible that some kind of a treaty or concordat may be arranged sometime between the Vatican and the Kremlin. From time to time there have been reports of feelers put out which would lead to such a result. Should such a treaty be arranged it would make no ultimate difference. It would merely represent a desire on the part of both states for a breathing spell. In the long run such a treaty would have no more significance than the treaty between Germany and Russia in 1939. The basic presuppositions of each are too absolute and opposed to permit permanent peace.

cult for it to be as ruthless as a real absolutism requires. Secondly, we are not quite so sure that our trinity of political democracy, private property and free enterprise is as perfect as we say it is. The Marxian criticism, that a capitalist society has within it inherent contradictions which produce either greater depressions, or wars of expansion, or both, has laid its icy hand on the hearts of multitudes of Americans. The very number of publications, speeches and propaganda "proving" that this is not true is an indication of our fear. Thirdly, America has become too soft and luxurious. The real thing that most Americans want is not a free democracy but material comfort. We want to help others but we want to keep our own standard of living more. It is significant that the Marshall plan was finally passed by Congress not primarily to meet human need but primarily to meet the threat of Russian expansion. One suspects that American respect for freedom and tolerance will decrease as fear of what will happen to our standard of living increases.

Thus what might be called the American absolutism is qualified and weakened. In the battle of absolutisms which is the characteristic of our age, it means that the United States is unequipped to play the decisive role except as it is drawn in on one side or the other of that conflict. The major battle of the twentieth century is the battle between Rome and Moscow. In this battle it is clear on which side America will take its stand. It has chosen to ally itself with the Roman absolutism,[29] and in the conflict this country is already lined

[29] If the continued presence of Ambassador Taylor at Rome in spite of Protestant protests is not enough, it would be difficult to find a more complete case of a *de facto* if not a *de jure* alliance than that which existed between the Roman Catholic Church and the United States Government in the 1948 spring election in Italy.

up with Rome against Russia. This alliance has been made on our part, not primarily because of any great love for Rome, for America is still nominally a Protestant country, nor particularly for fear of atheism, for nearly half of the population is unchurched. It has been made partly because the Roman Catholic Church in America is so well organized politically that no leading politician dare oppose it, and, more importantly, because of fear of what the Russian absolutism will do to our economics and privileged comfort. The Roman absolutism claims to defend both Christianity and the private property system and tends to identify the two. That is just the combination to appeal to the American mind.

This alliance was inevitable, and it may be necessary although that is less sure. Certainly, however, I would not want to give the impression that I am for the appeasement of Russia. I hope it is perfectly clear that no Communist could write what I have written in this book. Russian aggression must be resisted, but, Christianly speaking, not on the grounds that its economic system will upset our economic system. From the Christian perspective there is nothing inherently more Christian about capitalist economics than there is about communist economics and there is nothing inherently more Christian about private property than there is about communal ownership. Moreover we must not forget that the Christian Church is operating in Russia to-day. The tie-up between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian government is probably greater than Christians would desire but it is probably no greater than, if as great, as the tie-up of the Roman Catholic Church with Franco in Spain or Peron in Argentina. The Christian grounds for opposing

Russia are that the Soviet ruthlessly destroys human personality, that it declares that the ends justify any means, and that it self-righteously liquidates all who disagree. In a word we must vigorously oppose Russia because it is a religious-political absolutism.

But, and this is the question for Christians, particularly those who are concerned for the strategy of the Remnant, to consider: Is the Roman Catholic Church any less of a religious-political absolutism? On the surface Rome appears the more attractive to Americans. It appears more attractive partly because of its unqualified support of a private property system which is one of our own dogmas (although as I have said this dogma has no inherent Christian basis) and partly as the defender of Christianity. Yet in spite of the specific command of Our Lord, Rome seems as anxious for "the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them" as any secular political power. Partly it is attractive because in a struggle for survival one picks one's allies where one can find them without asking too many questions, just as we made an ally of Russia against Hitler. The alliance with Rome may be expedient and necessary on the level of political conflict, but the history of our alliance with Russia should be instructive.

When one examines the situation from an independent and objective perspective the Roman Catholic Church *as a political institution* [30] seems to be as much a self-appointed

[30] I would like to make it clear that this analysis of the Roman Catholic Church applies to it only from the point of view of a political institution. Unquestionably there are many many fine Roman Catholics. Lots of Roman Catholics are better Christians than lots of Protestants. Many of these Roman Catholic Christians are deeply concerned over the tactics of political Roman clericalism, but there is practically nothing that they can do about it. As G. A. Borgese has pointed out in his *Common Cause,* "On the whole liberal Catholics stop helpless at the

absolutism seeking for world power as Russia.[31] Both demand of their faithful unqualified obedience enforced by the threat of excommunication; the top hierarchy of both make policies secretly; both have a spearhead disciplined, militant, inner group—the Communist Party and the orders of priests; both believe and practice the theory that the end justifies the means; both, in democratic countries where it is to their advantage, use the technique of infiltration and united front where possible. In countries where they have control both penalize the opposition. The Russians may be more ruthless toward the opposition, but it is doubtful that a sincere Protestant Christian would find life any more tolerable in Spain than he would in Russia. In fact he might feel freer to practice his religion if he accepted the other conditions, under the Soviets.

In the July 1947 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, there is an arti-

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pitfall that the dogma of infallibility excavated in the road of Catholicism. We need not be reminded that said dogma refers to things only of 'faith and morals.' But a demarcation line between morals . . . and politics or economics . . . was never drawn to any eye's content. . . . The faithful knows not. They, the liberal Catholics, try to circumvent that pitfall on tiptoe; see it can't be done; so they stay mum—and deadlocked." Reprinted by permission of the Publishers, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, Inc., copyright 1943 by G. H. Borgese. Pages 335–336.

[31] In spite of the very obvious Roman desire to make itself palatable to the American public and its apparent satisfaction with our system of separation of State and Church, one should not forget that no responsible Roman Catholic spokesman has repudiated the vigorous strictures against democracy found in various Papal Encyclicals from the *Syllabus of Errors* on. Neither should one forget that the democratic system which operates in this country ranks fifth in Roman desirability and is accepted at the moment only because it cannot yet be changed. See *Common Cause* by G. A. Borgese, and *Catholic Principles in Politics* by Ryan and Boland, also *The Roman Catholic Church and Fascism, etc.* series in *The Nation* beginning April 10, 1948.

cle by "X" [32] which is an informative and illuminating discussion of Russia's underlying philosophy. One of the amazing features of this article is that by merely substituting the words "Vatican" for Kremlin, "Roman Catholicism" for socialism, "non-Roman" or "Protestant Christianity" for capitalism, and so on, the description becomes about as accurate of the Roman Catholic Church as it does of the Soviet. This presumably was not the intention of the author, but I give herewith a few word-for-word quotations, adding in parentheses Roman Catholic names.

Now it lies in the nature of the mental world of the Soviet (Roman Catholic) leaders, as well as in the character of their ideology, that no opposition to them can be officially recognized as having any merit or justification whatsoever. . . . Of the original ideology nothing has been officially junked. . . . But stress has come to be laid primarily on a few concepts which relate most specifically to the Soviet (Roman) regime itself: to its position as the sole truly socialist (Christian) regime in a dark and misguided world and to the relationship of power within it.

The first of these concepts is that of the innate antagonism between capitalism (non-Roman Christianity) and socialism (Roman Catholicism). . . . From it flow many of the phenomena which we find so disturbing in the Kremlin's (Vatican's) conduct of foreign policy: the secretiveness, the lack of frankness, the duplicity, the very suspiciousness and basic unfriendliness of purpose. . . .

The second of these concepts important to contemporary Soviet (Roman Catholic) outlook is the infallibility of the Kremlin (Vatican or Pope). The Soviet (Roman) concept of power, which permits no focal points of organization outside

[32] This article was republished in a condensed form in *Life* magazine (July 28, 1947) with a foreword suggesting that it represented the official view of the United States State Department.

the party (Church) itself, requires that the party (Church) leadership remain in theory the sole repository of truth. For if truth were to be found elsewhere, there would be justification for its expression in organized activity. But it is precisely that which the Kremlin (Vatican) cannot and will not permit.[33]

This poses a very real problem for the Protestant Christian. Both Rome and Moscow represent different political-religious absolutisms in mortal combat. In such a conflict it is very difficult to remain objective, and sensitive Christians feel drawn to one side or another of this battle. It is no academic question. On a number of occasions in the last few years, I have sat in on earnest discussions of the question of whether we shall ultimately be forced to choose between Rome or Moscow. On the one hand, Christians see a real threat to their economic freedom, on the other to their religious freedom, and on both to their political freedom. Furthermore *as Christians* they know that all political absolutisms, even (indeed, especially) when clothed in religious sanctions, are false alternatives. They know that the only Christian absolutes are the absolutes of faith in the redemptive power of God as revealed in Jesus Christ to redeem sinful men who seek him in repentance and faith. All political absolutes are human and therefore involve partial human perspectives, pride and self-righteousness—in a word, they are sinful, and to give them religious sanction makes them more sinful. Yet the problem, particularly in dealing with the strategy of the Remnant is a difficult one. What can be said?

[33] "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" by X in *Foreign Affairs,* An American Quarterly Review, July 1947 (used by permission; parentheses mine).

First of all it is obvious that Protestantism is not equipped to enter this arena of world political conflict. At this game Protestantism is at a distinct disadvantage compared with Rome. On the whole the Protestant Churches have not gone in for politics as has the Roman Church.[34] This is partly due to basic differences in doctrine, but it is not all due to virtue. To a very large degree it is due to inability. Protestantism, divided organizationally into denominations and emphasizing individualism (probably too much), simply has not the physical cohesion of Rome. It cannot act politically as Rome can even if it wants to. From one point of view this is nothing less than a tragedy and the judgment of God upon our sin and must be understood as such. From another point of view, however, this very inability to act politically may be the saving grace of God.

Protestant Christians, as people, are no different from and certainly no better than any other people. The temptations to use political power when possible are so great that few there be, if any, who can resist them. This is a weakness of human nature and there is absolutely no reason for assuming that Protestants are more virtuous than Roman Catholics in this regard. The situation of Protestant political ineptitude, therefore, may not be as unfortunate as it at first appears; it may be actually the grace of God! We are confronted with a paradox. In greater or less degree none of us can resist the temptations of power and all forms of power corrupt their users. The true Church which is the Remnant cannot ally itself with any political absolutism; it survives not by power-politics but by the mysterious power of God

[34] The most notable exception in this country was Prohibition which proved an unhappy experience.

in spite of men's power. The Remnant must take seriously its Lord's reply to the temptation of political power, "Begone Satan! for it is written 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" [35] We Protestants would probably also succumb to the temptation of world power were it possible, but in the present historical situation we are prevented from that possibility by our organizational divisions. We have to trust the power of God for that is all we have to trust. Thus the very circumstances which create our weakness and political ineptitude may be the grace of God. It may be the historical destiny of Protestantism in the twentieth century to be the saving Remnant. This at least is its possibility. It is also its challenge and its opportunity.

Does this mean that the strategy of the Remnant is to withdraw from the social scene and leave the world to its agony? Not at all! The history of the Remnant is clear; it has always analyzed, passed judgment upon, condemned and advised the society in which it has existed. The Remnant has a holy responsibility to point out the aberrations of its society and to encourage the good features, whether its society listens or not. In this task it must of course be soul-searching in its endeavor to speak from the point of view of God and not that of men. Furthermore the Remnant if it is truly the Remnant will demonstrate in its own life a quality which recognizes its dependence upon God and its brotherly love.

It is at this point as much as any other that we are forced to confess how far any of our churches are from being completely identifiable with the Remnant. The real tragedy and sin of Protestant Churches is not that they are organization-

[35] Matthew 4:10.

ally divided and therefore politically weak; the real tragedy and sin of the Protestant Churches is that not only are they primarily class-conscious and socially stratified, but that most of them are complacently content to remain that way. "In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female." [36] Most of our churches are racially segregated, bourgeois, and self-satisfied. Although the total amount given for missions and reconstruction has increased in recent years, the actual per capita giving has decreased. This picture would be too discouraging, were it not for the power of God and for "the seven thousand who have not bowed down the knee unto Baal." [37] It is they who are the true Remnant and the true Church against which "the gates of Hell shall not prevail." [38] This Remnant has membership in all churches and across all denominational lines. To it belongs the future!

The Remnant and Education

How large this group is no one knows. Probably it is larger than we think when we are most pessimistic. But certainly it is far smaller than the official church figures would indicate. In fact, it is the indifference and the lack of responsibility of the large church membership that so frequently thwarts the Remnant. Yet one suspects that this group is *potentially* larger than it appears. This leads to another demand for a strategy of the Remnant in our time.

There are probably millions of members in our churches

[36] Galatians 3:28.
[37] I Kings 19:18.
[38] Matthew 16:18.

who in their heart of hearts would like to belong to the Remnant but who have no idea of what it is all about. (There are probably other members, who if they truly understood the rigorous demands of the Remnant, would leave promptly!) Perhaps the greatest tragedy of modern churchmanship is the failure of its educational program. I know of no actual statistics, but it would be a safe bet that not one Protestant child in ten reaches maturity knowing what he believes as a Christian, why he believes it, why he is a Protestant (except that he was born one) or what the Church as the Body of Christ means. Unfortunately there are many Protestant ministers who do not understand the Church as the Body of Christ and who look upon the Church as primarily an agency for working out their own idealistic social reforms. Multitudes are taken into churches every year with only the flimsiest kind of instruction. They are almost begged to enter if they will only stand up and nod their heads at the right time. For all too many, church membership is little more than membership in a respectable club which stands for the "right things" (whatever they may be) and a vague spiritual emphasis. Indicative is the by-line frequently seen in real estate advertisements: "Schools, churches and bus lines within walking distance."

If the Church is to be the Remnant that it must be in order to be *the* Church, there must take place a decided tightening of the requirements for membership. Already our churches are cluttered with people who have no idea of what Christianity stands for and who would not like it if they knew. The fault is not theirs; the fault is with the ministers, religious educators, and deacons or elders who accepted them without making clear what Christian church membership

means. How much can be done with these people is uncertain, but certainly Christian charity should be exercised regarding them and we should never discount what the Holy Spirit can do if given a chance. The tragedy is that so little is done to educate these people beyond the minimal basis on which they were originally acepted into membership. Regarding new members, however, a lot can be done. There is no reason why the standards of churchmanship cannot be drastically raised, except the fact of our own ineptitude, fearfulness and lack of trust.

The Church at home would do well to copy the example of some of the churches in the foreign mission field where new members must go through a course of training and testing which lasts as long as two years in some cases. I have recently read a little book by a new convert to Christianity from agnosticism.[39] In it there is a very suggestive chapter on "The Disadvantages of Being a Christian." It would be excellent if pastors' classes spent one or more sessions realistically outlining the disadvantages of being a Christian in a world like ours. Such a program would take courage on the part of the pastors. It would certainly make the Year Book statistics look sad for a few years. But out of it would emerge a church that would be *the* Church.

Preparation for Church membership is of course part of the whole larger question of Christian education. As a number of our more sensitive Christian educators are aware, this whole area is one of the weakest parts of the Church's program. It is highly doubtful that what has passed for Christian education in most of our churches for the past generation deserves to be called either Christian or education. To

[39] *Stop Looking and Listen* by Chad Walsh, Harper Brothers, 1947.

begin even to discuss this question would carry us far beyond the limits set for this book. There is one aspect of the question which is, however, germane to the point of view here presented.

Too frequently Christian education has been identified with good ethics and morality, which are in turn identified either with the contemporary standards of ethics and morality or with an impossible idealism. Christianity has an ethic. I believe it the highest ethic there is. But the ethic is not primary with Christianity; it is secondary and derivative. Christian ethics are valid only because they rest upon an understanding of the relation between man and God revealed in Jesus Christ and consequently between man and man. Their ultimate justification depends on an eternal world, as I have maintained throughout this book. To try to establish, teach or justify the Christian ethic without first establishing Christianity's supra-mundane premise is ridiculous. Christianity is always more or less in conflict with the world; the Christian ethic is also different from and in conflict with the world. It is ridiculous to think that we can teach a Christian ethic or morality with any success to people who do not understand or do not believe the presupposition on which the ethic and morality stand. Norman Pittenger has some significant words on this subject which religious educators would do well to study:

> The failure to recognize the confessional nature of Christianity has one amazing consequence, sometimes found at the heart of the Church itself. This is the strange supposition that Christian standards of conduct, ideals of behavior, notions of right and wrong, can be expected to flourish among, or can be enforced upon those who are not in any sense concerned with

being Christian in belief or worship. This may be shown by the Church's attempt to force legislation, quite proper for Christians, which shall be binding upon everyone. Marriage and divorce is a case in point. How can one expect those who do not share the Christian faith and have no interest in Christian worship to accept the Christian notion of marriage and the Christian attitude toward divorce? The same fallacy is illustrated by the effort to thrust upon the younger generation, without first making them Christians, a standard of sexual morality which is possible only for Christians.[40]

Christianity is different and Christian ethics are different; the Remnant is in the world but not of it. If we demonstrate the beauty of the Christian life and ethic in our lives, we may hope that by God's grace at least some of those outside will be attracted. But we do both them and ourselves a disservice (indeed we commit blasphemy) when we let them think the Christian ethic can be lived apart from the Christian faith. If the Church is to be the Remnant, its education must be directed to making the membership know what this means and why.

The Churches and the Remnant

There is another aspect of the strategy of the Remnant which has been hinted at but needs more elaboration. By God's inscrutable wisdom we must live out our earthly lives in a Church and a Remnant divided by denominations and sects. As has been suggested above, this is probably part of God's judgment upon us for our pettiness and sin, but it is also part of God's grace. If the interpretation of God's ac-

[40] "What is Truth for Christians?" Reprinted by permission of the *Christian Century* from the issue of June 25, 1947.

tion which we have given is anywhere near correct, denominationalism must fit into His economy. Certainly for our lifetime the denominational organization of the Church will still be with us (I suspect that it will always be with us). It is impossible to be a Christian without being in some denomination. This must be accepted as part of God's will. And we should accept the denomination in which God has put us. The competition and proselytizing which goes on between different denominations within the Church is one of the most unChristian features of our day. There are only two legitimate reasons why a Christian should ever leave the denomination in which God has placed him. One is that he feels definitely called of God to a type of work, or a place of work, which he could not perform without changing his denomination. The other is that he is convinced that the church to which he belongs has so strayed from the Christian truth that it can no longer legitimately be called a Christian church. Then, of course, he must change. Beyond this, we work in that branch of the Church in which God has placed us.

Thus we live our Christian lives in, and work through, denominations and local churches, trying to make them more truly representatives of the Body of Christ which is the Remnant. At the same time we recognize that the Holy Spirit is of God and free, and that no man or church can claim priority on it. We recognize that the true Remnant cuts across all denominational lines. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them," said Our Lord.[41] Thus while we work through denominations, we recognize that denominations are only means and

[41] Matthew 18:20.

not ends; they are only partial representations of the Church, not the Church. Our highest loyalty is to the Church which is the fellowship of true believers in all denominations. This means that at times we may have to resist policies and practices of our church or denomination in the name of the Remnant. The denomination must always be judged in terms of the Remnant, never the Remnant in terms of the denomination.[42] It means further that at times we shall feel a closer bond of fellowship with some Christians in other denominations than we do with some members of our own. This fellowship should be encouraged. It is the basis of the ecumenical movement which is not only the most important development of the twentieth century (far more significant than the discovery of atomic energy) but also the most striking example of God's care for His Remnant. It seems safe to say that in our time the ecumenical movement does represent the work of the Remnant and that as Christians we have no more important single task than to do everything in our power to support and become part of it.

Samuel Butler once wrote of a church whose members would be equally shocked to see Christianity doubted or practiced.[43] His criticism is all too accurate today. Churches are made up of *members*, but the Remnant is made up of *disciples*, i.e., those who not only profess the faith but who also actively carry on the work of evangelism and try to establish the kingdom of love in their lives. "You will know them by their fruits." [44] The church members who say that Christianity is all right for them, but they are not interested

[42] This is the heresy of Roman Catholicism. The Protestant churches have not altogether escaped it. It is the continual temptation of all.

[43] *The Way of All Flesh* by Samuel Butler.

[44] Matthew 7:16.

in missions, or who, in our day, are willing to give generously to a new (and often unnecessary) church building program at home but only give a pittance to the world church reconstruction program, have automatically indicated that they are church members and not disciples, that they do not know what Christianity is all about and that they have barred themselves from membership in the Remnant. *The Remnant is that fellowship of disciples in all churches, all lands and of all races who recognize a loyalty to each other in Christ which surpasses every other loyalty.* The importance of this statement cannot be overemphasized. In practical terms it means that those of us who are Christians have a higher loyalty, a greater responsibility, a deeper sense of fellowship with the Negro Christian, or the Japanese Christian or the German Christian, whom we may never meet and probably could not talk to if we did, than we have to the very charming neighbors who are not Christian, or who may even belong to the same church but who are not disciples. It means that the demands of the Remnant are above and go beyond the demands of our nation, or of our denomination, or of our business, or even of our own family.

Nowhere has this point of view been expressed more forcefully or beautifully than it was by an unknown Christian, writing some time in the first half of the second century. The writing is simply known as "The Epistle to Diognetus" [45] and it says in part:

> Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind by country, or by speech, or by custom. For they do not dwell in cities of their own, or use a different language. . . . This

[45] Translated by L. B. Radford in *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church,* Vol. I to A.D. 313, Macmillan Company.

knowledge of theirs has not been discovered by the thought and effort of inquisitive men; they are not champions of a human doctrine as some men are. But while they live in Greek or barbarian cities according as each man's lot is cast, and follow the customs of the land in clothing and food, and other matters of daily life, yet the condition of citizenship which they exhibit is wonderful, and admittedly beyond all expectation. They live in countries of their own, but simply as sojourners; they share the life of citizens, they endure the lot of foreigners; every foreign land is to them a fatherland, and every fatherland a foreign land. . . . They spend their existence upon earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. . . . They obey the established laws, but in their own lives surpass the laws. . . . They love all men and are persecuted by all . . . they are put to death, and yet give proof of new life. . . . They are dishonored, and their dishonor becomes their glory; they are reviled, and yet are vindicated. . . .

In a word what the soul is in the body Christians are in the world. The soul is spread through all the members of the body; so are Christians through all the cities of the world. . . . The soul is enclosed within the body and itself holds the body together; so too Christians are held fast in the world as in a prison, and yet it is they who hold the world together. . . . So great is the position to which God has appointed them and which it is not lawful for them to refuse.

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